

THE  
VALLEY  
ROAD

✧  
MARY  
HALLOCK  
FOOTE




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Books by Mary Hallock Foote

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THE VALLEY ROAD





# THE VALLEY ROAD

BY

MARY HALLOCK FOOTE



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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

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## PREFACE

THE author knows that her readers by now must be chiefly the old friends who read her books when she and they were young. To those few, preoccupied as they are with their individual share in the times we have lived to see, it would be easier to offer a story as belated as this if it could be mentioned that the work on it was done before the war ; it has seemed strange enough to be going on with mere mechanical revision — seated, as it were, with one's knitting at the spectacle of the world's agony since August of last year.

GRASS VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

*July, 1915*





THE VALLEY ROAD

PART I



# THE VALLEY ROAD

## CHAPTER I

A MAIL had arrived in camp by means of a man on horseback who yelled from across the river. He was not kept waiting long. A boat shot out from the opposite bluff strongly rowed by a young fellow, bare-headed, in his shirt-sleeves, hot from the drawing-tent whence he had rushed to seize the ferryman's job. Horses and whatever pertained to the road were kept on the other side—where there was no road, but a few hoof- and wagon-tracks, when travel was brisk, came in touch eventually with a stage-station somewhere in the desert. This was a locating-camp.

Scarth, the engineer in charge, sat on the side of his cot smoking and smiling to himself : he was reading a four-sheet letter from his wife. The lines ran swiftly from edge to edge of the page—every inch was covered in her small, nervous, precipitate hand much used and mal-used in this kind of correspondence. She was giving him—warm—her description of the christening ceremonies bestowed on their youngest, the infant daughter Scarth had never seen. Caroline was a brave little woman, at least her husband called her so ; but she had not been brave enough to “have” her baby anywhere near his present field

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of work. Hence these thick letters from her in the home of her New England girlhood, — where she abode with her little son and where the baby had come upon the scene, — to him in his grimy tent, with the clean nonsense of the boys for society, and, for christenings and so on, the silent self-watch of proud fatherhood — and always the work on his mind.

His field was a place of such geographical privacy that you reached it by three hundred miles of stage-line and the wagon-tracks—at the same time he shared the un-privacy of a camp of men, where your safe-box is a portmanteau which has been in the river and refuses to lock, and your secretary a canvas war-bag that locks with brass eyelets and a piece of rope. A prudent man would have regularly burned those wifely screeds, which spared nothing in their intimacy, but Scarth was a better “sport” than that: if anything should happen to him, he knew what the boys would do in regard to private letters. But he did not propose that anything should happen—or rather he never thought about it. He expected to live and see the kiddies grow up, and the little girl some day would like to read of her own christening in her mother’s handwriting.

But a rose — a pale pink, withered rose — that drops out of a letter which has spent a week in a Western mail-bag! — what is a man in camp to do with a thing like that? Scarth looked at it and smiled and laid it down gingerly on the cot beside him; and presently he read that the rose when fresh had come from the wreath around the christening-bowl, the same having



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been more festively in evidence at his and Caroline's wedding in its normal use as the old Baxter punch-bowl.

A whirl-blast dervished up the cañon, entered the tent without ceremony, left considerable dust and departed with the rose. But its mission, as such things go, was finished in that ghost of fragrance lingering in the paper with its subtle power of quickening latent memories. There were roses in the borders and roses all over the Baxter house, five—six summers ago, and the bed-linen and bureau-drawers smelled of rose-leaves dried, when he courted his wife there soberly in the sight of her people downstairs, and went upstairs to dream of her alone. . . . Well; this christening was a May christening, after the usual storm which "shakes the darling buds" of New England's May. He remembered how at this season the furnace would be shut down punctually and sweet-smelling fires of apple-tree trimmings lighted in the parlor grates. It was one of those 1836 houses, with matched parlors which might have been named "Purity" and "Peace," and of course it was a house immaculate. You looked from room to room when the doors were apart—they were as like as two sisters, the front parlor a little more dignified, the back one a trifle cozier, with a modern piano in place of the great sofa in the front room and not so many or so formal tables of shining mahogany veneered. And as the mind of one sister often repeats with a slight difference the impressions of another, the tall, twin mirrors at the top of each room endlessly duplicated and confused each other's

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reflections upon whatever passed within their limited range of vision. The mirrors would have been crowded that day, when the guests were assembling and the christening-party passed up the handsome old rooms to the place of family solemnities. Old Dr. Wilson, who was with them in all their vital events, never had to be told where to take his stand.

Caroline wrote of the cherry trees, white with blossoms, that looked in through the large, clear-paned windows, fairly shedding light on the occasion, and how the robins kept up their shouting all through the hush before the minister's words. The whole communion of saints was there — the Baxter saints, as Caroline called the elders of her family — gathered to witness one more Baxter baby started on the same good old positive way. Scarth had seen enough of life in other places to know the value of a little narrowness when the "greater love" and a great sincerity and faithfulness went therewith. He prized it all — he dwelt on the scene, in his wife's words, with tender, humorous appreciation. The great-aunts in their best silks and shoulder-wraps seated in draftless corners, the young cousins smiling around in smart spring costumes; the little bud, whose party it was, borne proudly up the room in a drift of snowy long-clothes and the sweetest of shawls hooded about her silky head; Caroline and little son in summer white — son in short socks for the first time that spring (no sparing of detail here) and his fair curls cropped below his ears, going from one to another of the relatives dutifully putting out a shy, brown hand.

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Caroline's parents had both died young leaving her without brother or sister. As to advice, she had been adopted by practically all the aunts and great-aunts, but her home had been always with Uncle Benjamin Baxter, a widower, and in that house her natural adviser would have been Cousin Olivia—who never gave advice. When the expected baby proved to be a girl, family opinion decided that she ought to be another Olivia Baxter—Cousin Olivia saying nothing. Caroline—taking a deep breath for what she knew must come—announced that the name would be Engracia: she said it conclusively, and though not quite strong as yet physically, her Baxter will was in no degree impaired. A stupefied silence followed. As no one was prepared with a good argument, the poor ones came first.

“You have named one child for the Scarths already, my dear:—why go back to that Spanish woman?”

Caroline dealt once more with this persistent fallacy respecting her husband's mother's extraction. “She was n't Spanish! Judge Ludwell's daughter Engracia was no more Spanish than we are.”

“Then, if you want to name the baby for her, why not call her ‘Grace,’ and have done with it? How do you pronounce ‘Engracia’?”

“I don't pronounce it; but I like it—mis-pronounced—better than Grace proper, so to speak.”

“But how did it come into the family if there is no Spanish blood?”

“Because”—Caroline had told this several times before, but no one remembers the complications of

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another family's past — "Judge Ludwell made his first trip to California — long before he went there to stay — when everything *was* Spanish. He did n't marry a Spanish woman — he was married already — but he liked their names. He came home and named his baby daughter, just born, 'Engracia.' Years after, when she was grown, he went back — about the time of the gold-rush; and Hal's father took a holiday and went out there and married her — but it was no holiday to get her! That is the beginning of Engracia in the Scarth family. . . . Hal wrote me to do just as I pleased, but if I wanted to please him, the baby's name, if it should be a girl . . . " So the matter was settled, and the family — not being unused to little defeats in a good cause — accepted the superfluous vowels; and certainly the Name did not spoil the Day.

The woman whose memory it honored had blue, dark-lashed eyes, as you see in her miniature by Stuart Newton, one of the few he is known to have done, painted in England and perhaps a labor of friendship. Henry Scarth went over there as Secretary of Legation, a post he could hardly afford, but he and his young wife made a great personal success, as in her case this miniature might witness. The forehead is extremely clever — not large but packed. The stiff curls of the period shade it and droop against a cheek of purest oval. The nose is delicate, aquiline, joined to the broad brows with a deep depression. The eyes are far apart and the mouth, with its short upper lip and exquisite corners, would be a valuable

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possession in any family ; — there could not be a sweeter woman's mouth than Engracia Ludwell Scarth's — who joined her good pride of Southern birth to one of Northern, equally good, and softened both prides with love, and deepened the love by trials in the flesh, and lifted it, through self-denial, almost within reach of certain ideals that governed both pride and love with her. They were lost at sea going around the Horn in response to that invitation so long waited for — to them both — from the old Judge when his heart began to soften, too late. So there were no grandparents on either side, for these young Scarths.

Caroline had read and admired (what time she was looking for evidences of talent on "Hal's side" that she might of it boast to her own) the book his father wrote when a young man fresh from taking his degree at Harvard ; it is long since out of print. It was he who crossed the plains on horseback, as we have heard, early in the fifties and wrote engagingly of his journey and of the excited little city of the sand-hills, just beginning then to send for its wives and sisters, and there would have been a few grown-up daughters ; Judge Ludwell had one, this exquisite Engracia, but of course he could n't expect to keep her in that rout of suitors. What apparently hurt him most was, that among them all she chose the young Bostonian and went back with him to his frigid East just as the West was unfolding glorious banners of prosperity.

A deeper, unconfessed offense, it was said, lay in the traveler's point of view, revealed with the artlessness of



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young authorship in his book issued about the time of his wooing. The Judge was a Southerner, and you could not speak of San Francisco in those days and leave out the ruling social element, or that which claimed to rule — much the most picturesque “material” in the new city; but it certainly did keep alive a sense of personal responsibility which called peaceful citizens out on the dueling-ground and sometimes dispensed with even that formality, and other habits, strictly “among gentlemen,” which may not have appealed to the young New Englander except on his literary and perhaps sarcastic side. There was in fact scarcely anything the North or South could say of each other, in those days, which failed to irritate.

Outwardly, the Judge became reconciled to his son-in-law, but never to his literary ambitions or to his Northern birth. He was now a man of wealth, and rich men are easily jealous of the great stuff in their possession: it hurts them to give it away to those who pretend to hold it negligible, or show no aptitude for either making or keeping it. Why waste money on that writing-chap? Engracia Scarth asked no favors naturally and was as haughty-minded as her husband. And so there was little to leave this grandchild, besides the dark-lashed eyes and the long-voweled Spanish name, which, the aunts said, did not “go well” with Scarth. It went well with it in marriage, however; for in spite of ups and downs and a trying unworldliness about money, these two left behind them the memory of great happiness together.

With the money safe in the male line and the old



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Judge long in his grave, it could have been only some sentiment connected with his memory (a kindly and a generous one when all is said) which led the disinherited Scarths to call their first-born after him, Thomas Ludwell — the only living Thomas Ludwell being Cousin Tom, capitalist, of San Francisco, quite a stranger to the Eastern branch and unaware of a little kinsman who had stepped into his name before he had a son of his own to bear it.

The Judge in his will passed over his own son — a disappointing life, with rather too much of the “ruling element” in it — and left the bulk of his fortune to his son’s son, named for him, first cousin to Henry Scarth on his discredited mother’s side. It gave the young man an early start in life and a seat at the great game of finance on the West Coast; though there were some bad losers who called it by a ruder name. But the old Judge would have been pleased if he could have lived to see results so far beyond the wildest dreams of his own time, when dreamers, as we know, did not stint themselves.

## CHAPTER II

THE Ludwells and the Scarths went their separate ways for a number of years, with the continent between them. Henry Scarth's wedding-cards when he married Caroline Baxter were duly sent to Thomas Ludwell and wife, and Anna the wife asked who they were and was told, and forgot all about them. The baby Engracia was four, perhaps, and little Tom nine, when the Marysville stage set them all down one mid-summer day, with large luggage around them, under an enormous California live-oak that roofed the road and shaded the front of a long, double-verandahed house planted opposite, without fence or any other preliminaries between. And while Scarth "settled" with 'Gene Thompson, driver, and the stage-team drank from the horse-trough platformed against the oak, Caroline, with her offspring around her, stood and took a first shrinking look at her new home.

Little Tom, whose latest ideas of home included Uncle Benjamin's gateposts and big front lawn, announced, not without satisfaction in the change, "Why, it's right on the road!" —and undoubtedly it was.

That evening, when a strong pink and sallow after-glow pierced the rifted chambers of the oak, and turned the dust-wake of a passing team to pastel-colored haze, Caroline, seated by her man on their own

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front steps at last, with the children asleep upstairs in their own bedrooms (small and queer and stuffy), regretting nothing and happy as a girl, began at once with the question closest that moment to her heart:—

“How long do you think we shall stay?”

“The Lord knows, girl!”

“Does n’t the company know?”

“The company says it’s up to me. The ‘company’ is chiefly Schuyler Rivington.”

“And what are you most afraid of? Schuyler Rivington?”

“Him least of all — you can talk to him! But there is always the ignorance of those you can’t talk to, and ignorance means impatience — quite justifiable. Land schemes are slow, and we all judge things half done unless they happen to be things we have done ourselves.”

She sighed. “When I look about this queer old place — only half look — I just go wild with its possibilities!”

“I expect it will be the same outside.”

“Then let’s *be* wild! Let’s do something while we are here.”

“We’ll abolish the kitchen-porch,” said Scarth indulgently. “The company at least can afford to keep us from typhoid. And we’ll plough up that chicken-compound which I suppose you have got your eye on for a garden —”

“Hal!” she cried, “what a nice boy you are to go West with! By the way, what was this place called?”

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Did n't you say it was an old road-house in the fifties?"

"Very much so! Its name was 'Pete Smith's' and it's 'Pete Smith's' still. You'll find it scrawled on all your parcels from Torresville."

Caroline laughed. "That's realism! But it is n't going to stay 'Pete Smith's.' What do you think of 'Roadside' for a name? — Did you hear what Tom said? That child gets right down to the facts; he always sees the main point first."

She was young, and she cared about names and a great many other trifles, when Scarth first took the management of the Torres Tract and shut up the best "bar" on the road. Torresville had reason to thank him; but the native must have his little joke at newcomers who arrive after the real work of pioneering is over, and set up confident standards of their own, and look about them in the spirit of that well-known condescension in Easterners.

"Say, Bill," one old rancher informed another as two teams stopped to water at the public trough beneath the oak, "this ain't goin' to be 'Pete's' any more now the new folks has come. This here's 'Roadside,' and don't you forgit it."

"That so? Well, where'll ye git a place round here that ain't 'roadside'?"

And indeed this part of California is not a country of private parks and long carriage-approaches.

Scarth found the old road-house central for his duties which took him all over the big, puzzling domain, studying its possibilities and piecing out its

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revenues in the day of small things. Caroline went with him, through the long waiting weeks of the endless California autumn which lingers until Christmas, dropping a little snow on late rosebuds as you go up into the foothills. They rode the horses of the country, or they took a child between them in the box-buggy, a lunch, and a novel for mamma, stowed beneath the seat:—climbing long hills toward the placer-country and picnicking on the edges of deep, silent, dusty woods. They looked down into dry gulches, deserted, once swarming with men. When he told her the names of the dead little mining-towns they rode through, she laughed — because Bret Harte, whom she was re-reading, has located “You Bet” and “Red Dog” immortally in another county. They argued the point — he meticulous as to maps, she sticking to her essential truths of fiction.

But as to their own Marysville road and Marysville stage, — ‘Gene Thompson was not, of course, Yuba Bill, neither were they “Pete Smiths,” — but there was no doubt about the road and the old, two-seated jerky. Jack Hamlin might have assisted pretty Mrs. Brown in her green veil up the steps of their own piazza, while Colonel Starbottle, widowed of his gallant opportunity, headed gloomily the male contingent, making as one throat for the bar.

“Are your glasses charged, gentlemen?” — sadly the Colonel’s ghost would be cheated in these days!

She may have feared a little for her children, if this were to be their permanent home. But nothing is permanent in the lives of engineers. It made things



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beautifully simple for her. Caroline was not too fond of the kind and talkative East — when there ; though she swore by it and saw nothing, and nobody, half so good, wherever else she went. She had a social conscience all too easily lulled into dangerous repose ; a lonely child, she had grown up a dreamy girl in a house full of books and of time to read them. Cousin Olivia had never tried to give her “good habits.” She was unworldly because to her the world was a small, selected circle she had parted from three thousand miles away, and she was in no hurry to make a new one. Having few books, meantime, and no one of her own age all day to talk to, she chewed the cud of memory : she was steeped in quotations — frequently incorrect — rags and tags of poetry ; everything she saw reminded her of something else, especially something haunting she had read. After a while a daughter grew up who could understand (and had a better verbal memory for old quotes), and a son was growing up who could understand his father’s outdoor dreams as well.

It was the following April when Caroline, lying awake listening to the birds at sunrise, thought out a new staircase to go up from her husband’s office where the old mahogany bar came away, leaving marred woodwork and stains on the floor. By another spring it had gone up, precisely as she planned, with one turn and a ravishing glimpse, through a little high window to light the landing, straight into the green-and-gold chambers of the oak. Often, passing up and down, absorbed in some commonplace housekeeping



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reverie, her absent eyes would encounter two other pairs of eyes in the faces of her children, startling her in their sweetness against a loophole of blue sky. It was like breaking into heaven unawares, while you are thinking of the toughness of valley beef.

As for the old staircase (it was merely stairs) that choked an ugly passage between former barroom and former "Ladies' Parlor," they abolished it and took passage into parlor, making a charming, long sitting-room, with a boxed beam across the ceiling where the old partition came away, and French windows opening on — what would be the garden — now, unspeakable! But in front! — Listen to this, Cousin Olivia of the roses: a hedge of oleander trees — not bushes — taller than your head, meeting the veranda-railing at each end, and behind the screen they made on one side, the remains of an old apple orchard. The trees were stooping, crooked, unkempt, — the oleanders were ragged and dusty; but, wait a year or two! — grass, cool and short, with shadows of the low trees upon it, bright garden-beds beyond, a long brick walk on the north side in front of the sitting-room windows — Heaven, we are told, lies about us in our infancy, and heaven knows it is not our dreams and the foolishness they lead to we wish to forget when we are old, but the mornings when we woke to the cock-crow of reality, and saw life in its baldness and its risks with a heart full of fear, and spake hard truths, not truth, to those we loved, and quenched their dreams and parted with our own in the name of this world's prudence.

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Another year, they opened an outlook to the west through trees which made their upper rooms dark in winter ; and “ lo, the valley hollow ” — the Sacramento Valley, not “ lamp-bestarred,” for it is a monstrous, empty valley below little “ Roadside ” and the other little roadsides with their far-scattered lights. The only signals at night are the great stars, the only boundary by day, in this direction, is the blue, pure line of the Coast Range one hundred and fifty miles away.

### CHAPTER III

"IT strikes me they do you rather well, your company." Cousin Tom looked about him, gratified if somewhat surprised at the changes. He remembered "Pete Smith's" when it served the public on that road. He and his charming wife were up on their first, experimental, visit to his Eastern relatives: he had not pressed himself — this was the Scarths' third year on the Torres Tract.

Scarth said nothing, but Caroline gayly took up the word: "Company not at all, Cousin Tom! This is our own private extravagance. The company bought the house and handed it over to us — and I wish you could have seen it!"

Anna Ludwell laughed, but Cousin Tom looked rather blank. His impression was, and perfectly correct, that Hal Scarth's salary left little margin for this sort of thing and would not be largely increased unless he could make a paying proposition out of the old grant.

"You don't know, I suppose, how long you are likely to be here?" he asked his cousin significantly.

Scarth was the younger, but by nature unfitted to take a suggestion of this sort from a relative and a wealthier man.

"Oh, no," he answered lightly.

But Caroline made haste to justify — "This is the

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place our children will remember as home : we are pretty sure to stay as long as that." To Anna Ludwell, sure of sympathy, she added, "There was n't a closet in the house, and you could n't breathe in the same room with those old wall-papers."

"I should think you would get tired if your directors don't," the men's dialogue continued.

"I shall not get tired," said Caroline's engineer.

"Then you must like to work for nothing," said Anna's capitalist.

The women smiled at each other in mutual reassurance, doubting how far these cousin-husbands would go.

"I don't work for nothing," said Scarth, "but I expect to wait awhile for my pay."

He rose, and they all went out to look at a rich spring sunset that suddenly irradiated the room. It was the morning room upstairs where two windows had been joined by breaking out a third between that came down to the floor. They stepped outside on a balcony open to the sky.

"That's a pretty foreground." Cousin Tom considered favorably the effect of the dim little farms overpowered by that mounting splendor. Here a hill-orchard turned its late blossoms to the flame, or a spire of poplars leaped into glory, or a wave of pale young wheat streaked the heather-colored dusk with silver.

"All very pretty as it lies there —"

"Very practical," said Scarth. "That's where our infant revenues come from ; but watch and you'll

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see us grow. We shall climb out of the valley in a few years and take in the lower foothills : it's bound to be a great fruit country, this — Oregon can't show any better apples than Penn Valley and Pet Hill."

"'Pet Hill!'" Caroline echoed ; she wished the others not to miss her joy in California's early nomenclature : but they were only politely amused — it was not so new to them.

"I can perfectly see why you love it here," said Anna Ludwell cordially — she could n't of course : a very finished little worldling with a heart of gold ; but that did not rob her of the pleasure of saying so to a woman she wholly pitied and had begun to like.

Caroline's face lighted up ; she answered in good faith : "It *is* an ideal life for the children."

"— While they are children," Anna permitted herself to add.

"Hal is rather cut off from men of his own class — though we rather avoid the word."

"Don't you think we have classes, then?"

"Oh, certainly ; but it does n't matter what we think : he has to get at these people here ; he has to work with them, somehow. It would n't do to begin by setting up to be different — and he does n't feel different. In his work "earth" has always meant something to be moved, to be got rid of, or to use in some other shape. Here it means people, and people he must have. He lives in his farmers ! They are a tedious lot, but he strangely likes the poor fellows. He tolled them in here — he fasted and prayed for them — he sorted them out with sobs and tears, — and

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there were *none* of the 'largest size' —" she ran on gayly behind her husband's unconscious back. "Their little ranches he has just about created with his faith and frantic inducements and their hard work and the company's wasted water; it all depends on their patience and some things he hopes to beat into their heads (of 'solid ivory'!) before he's done with them — what *he* will be able to do: I mean his dream for the future of the grant —" she stopped abruptly, finding herself on too intimate ground.

Anna listened, wondering if a husband can be altogether delighted to have his business (a sacred word with her husband) made the theme of his wife's raillery, even quite in the family. Self-contained and somewhat literal persons have time for such reflections while the nervous speakers are cracking on before any chance breeze of sympathy. The breeze dropped a little: Caroline became aware of a slight halt in the attention of her listener. Anna had lent half an ear to the men's conversation. She was sure that her husband had inside knowledge, acquainted as he must be with the history of the grant, by which to gauge his cousin's chances of success. It was painful to her kind heart to hear them tilting at each other with all the advantage on the stronger side.

The men were enjoying themselves, after the marry-come-up style that obtained in their boyhood. They had shared a few terms in preparatory schools before Tom Ludwell entered Yale: his mother — his father was a cipher — believed in Eastern training for her son of the Golden West. Since that time they



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had never met, but almost at sight the old relations and almost the same points at issue were resumed.

The Torres Tract had a history which has been told in several different ways: without being subtle, we may call it an unholy grab. Such land grabs were common as every one knows, and legal in the time of them. It included water rights, ditches and defunct placer mines, and now farmers as a last resort.

A company of Eastern capitalists had bought it for the value of its mines. If the Californians who sold it knew, they neglected to mention that a certain long-fought battle in the courts had been won by the farmers, which would shut those placers down till omelets are made without breaking eggs; till you can tear out the breast of a mountain and flail it down fine with iron streams of water and send those streams away cleansed of the deed, with no burden of sand to dump upon the farmers' crops or add to the bed of the puzzled Sacramento. The farmers' word was now the miners' law, and everyone who owned a placer mine was trying to unload.

They had their bad bargain on their hands and they sent out a man in the strength of his forty years (when a man expects trouble) to see what could be made of it. Scarth must have known that he would be side-tracked on the road to professional reputation — he probably did not worry about that. Reputations take care of themselves: his had procured him this work which called for an honest man; after that, for one with "nerve, patience, initiative,

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and a varied practical training to draw upon" — thus the offer had been flatteringly worded. There was nothing flattering about the salary. But what he and Caroline wanted was a home, founded on a job which might be likened to a serial rather than a short story as with most of their home propositions heretofore.

They came out, wild as their own children with the ancient joy in the beginnings of things. It is not every day a man is given a free hand and sixty thousand acres of land and told to go make a country! Very little money all this while: the man must find his own way out of his troubles. Now, let rich cousins with their fatted securities ask wearily, "Do you like to work for nothing?"

Scarth vaunted to his wife in their bedroom that night, "Good Lord! before I'd be Tom! He's only four years older than I am and he's got it all: he's done. He couldn't make himself poor if he tried, and he'd sooner die than *be* poor. How much of the man is left after that!"

"Of the boy, perhaps," said Caroline, who felt a weakness for these Ludwells creeping over her. "I think Anna likes him pretty well if he is rich. Most of their friends are in the same parlous state. It gives them what they want for Clare."

"And by and by there will be something she wants they can't give her: they are n't necessarily making life easy for Clare, if there is anything in her."

"Well, I should n't worry about Clare. Of course

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they will have their regrets and they won't be the same as ours; but I would n't brag" — she backed up to him to be set free where a hook had caught in her lace yoke behind — "I would n't brag about my abstemiousness as a father. You could n't be trusted one moment with Cousin Tom's income if Engracia were ten years older. You would buy her a pearl necklace the first thing."

"I'd buy one for you — and you'd 'exchange' it for something for Engracia."

That Cousin Tom became his birthright as Head of the Family goes entirely without saying. He used capitals as his grandfather had before him, and thought the old Judge did excellent well to spell Property with another capital, and to leave his unmutilated to carry on the name. But gentlemen of that fine old feudal type looked after the junior branches and the female line. When he learned from his wife that the Scarths had come to the question of a school for young Tom, he asked, "What are they going to make of him?"

"Oh, he's made," Anna replied: "he's cut out for his father's profession. They don't expect to give him a university degree, but they want him to have the same preparation — some good classical school."

Cousin Tom, raised his eyebrows: "Well, good classical schools are expensive; but they may be right. He would meet a set of boys it might be useful for him to know."

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Anna, in behalf of the absent, exclaimed, "They would never think of that at Tom's age."

"Friendships begin at that age. Engineers should make friends with Capital: they want him to get on, don't they?"

"In their sense, of course: they don't expect him to be wealthy."

"What does an engineer want with Greek and Latin?"

"They have their ideas — very good ones. Caroline says he'll never touch a classic, even English, out of school: he's all construction, mechanics; and the masters at those boy universities in the East are men —"

"In the East!" Cousin Tom smiled dryly:—"nothing good enough out here, I suppose? How old is Tom?"

"About twelve. But he must go to some school. They have been sending him to a district school where he is the only gentleman's son — they are very amusing about it — so afraid of the word. But I can see Caroline cringe at the accent he is beginning to pick up; that boneless English with a swagger to it —"

"That's all foolishness: a boy can't go around with his English wrapped in a napkin."

"He can be sent to a school where the question does n't come up; — it does seem as if our own tongue should come as a matter of course. We don't want to make our children prigs, listening to themselves talk, nor is it nice to have them talk — as Tom is

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beginning to. I sympathize entirely with Caroline. — Engracia she gives lessons herself, but a boy must mix with other boys."

" — If they can find any good enough." Cousin Tom's intentions left room for a little sarcasm. As the outcome of this conversation he offered, through his wife, to "stand" young Tom's schooling and mentioned a school in the East which he might have chosen for a boy of his own. His wife adored him openly for his handsome way of doing things: she had had this end in view all the time.

But the Scarths, it seemed, had decided upon St. Luke's already. They thanked Cousin Tom in Caroline's best phrases, but the offer was declined; they were able to manage it themselves. The business man said nothing, wondering meanwhile how in the deuce Hal Scarth *did* manage it.

Some swift years passed with increasing friendship on the women's part and the familiar contradictoriness on the men's, expressed in offhand language. Engracia's turn had come, and she went East to a school as distinguished for girls as Tom's boy university, and Cousin Tom came out flat with the question, "Has Caroline any money of her own?"

"I don't know: she has relatives in the East who are very good to her."

"I'm a relative — but there is reason in all things."

"Engracia is not a boarding-pupil at Miss Deane's: she stays with friends of Caroline's — not smart persons — just what you would want for a young girl. It's the tone — and they save in other ways. They



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keep only their Chinaman in winter ; Caroline spends very little on dress — relatives again. There is a 'Cousin Olivia' whose gowns she comes in for : it's their little joke that Cousin Olivia buys all her things with strict reference to how they will look on Caroline. It's really a great mercy : cheap clothes don't do at all for Caroline."

"Well, she's a clever woman : why can't she keep on with Engracia herself?"

"Teach her altogether, you mean?"

"Yes, why not? Caroline is well educated."

"Not for a teacher ; and she could n't teach music and dancing — that sort of thing."

"Is that sort of thing so necessary in Engracia's case? If they want to send her East, why don't they do something practical? — put her in some school like Pratt's Institute."

Anna was scandalized by the mere name ; it had not come in her way to know what a Pratt's Institute might be like.

"— Certainly : where they teach all the new arts and crafts and fit out any sort of talent or fraction of a talent, and prepare a girl to earn her living."

"Some man will earn a living for Engracia," said Anna coldly. "She is going to be a very attractive girl."

"It is a fallacy, Anna, to suppose, because a girl is attractive, she is sure to marry. How many of our handsomest women in San Francisco have made themselves old maids by their own perseverance."

"Engracia will marry," Anna nodded : "she may



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not marry wisely, but she will not persevere in shirking the experiment. She has — ” Anna hesitated for an adjective delicate enough to define some trait she discerned in Engracia, corresponding to the slight rift between the life-line and the head-line in her palm.

“ You think she might plunge, eh ? ”

“ Only for one reason. She has imagination enough to complete the picture if some man can give her a good start — on high grounds, you know. She would expect a great deal, but she might think she had got it when she had n’t at all.”

“ You have rather more opinion of Tom’s common sense ? ”

“ But I like her. She is going to develop great charm — type, that is it: the rarest thing in beauty we have left.”

“ Oh, is that so ? ” said Cousin Tom, amused at his wife’s seriousness, and her passion for making a theory to fit each individual case.

## CHAPTER IV

IT was March, spring of nineteen hundred and four : Japan and Russia in the lime-light, — great impatience in the big world for its daily paper ; and the Marysville stage, disgracefully late, plodding up the valley with news of that astonishing war.

Scarth had closed his desk early. The big room downstairs, besides being the home of drafts (Caroline's admired staircase landed just opposite the mouth of a chimney built when wood was cheap), harbored presences which make a man restless : yet there was nothing essentially regrettable in the absence of both their grown-up children, which left the house so wistful as the rainy winter twilights came on. Engracia was in New York giving an extra year to music, chaperoned by one of those numerous dear cousins to whom they feared no obligation. She was a year older than Clare Ludwell, who would be a very select bud in San Francisco next season — that was another sort of efflorescence. Engracia, in spite of Cousin Anna's prediction, might very conceivably be called on to face a life of high-minded spinsterhood, but she could n't be expected to without the mind, and something to put in it besides dreams. Caroline had begun to admonish herself of dreams now that she no longer knew what her only girl was dreaming about. She felt it wiser to keep the waters moving.

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Tom was where any young man, that year, would have thanked his stars to be: his own father envied him his front seat at the war, and mocked the mother of her fears—yet gently. This was the boy's fourth year from home and her face began to show it.

An aged bull-terrier, victim of the fire habit, rose up stiffly, yawned and followed Scarth upstairs. He entered his mistress's presence with fond, obsequious head, wagged across to her and let himself down on the edge of her skirt: "Ye gods! another fire!"

"Has he been out at all to-day?" she asked guiltily: it was her task to exercise Bran—being the only known means of making her walk regularly herself.

"He went with Moon when he carried scraps to the hens;—old gun-fighter—feeding hens!" Scarth poked the obese sinner with his foot and Bran rolled over and lolled at him shamelessly. Caroline put on her raincoat and buttoned it, talking to Bran.

"Come, you old baby, we must do our piazza-stunt,—bear up!"

She had heard the belated stage drive past, having left the mail, but pretended that she had n't; mail-times were a form of torture to her these days. Tom had not been heard from since November. He was in Korea, on his first job, shut up by winter and the war. It was hardly conceivable that he had seen no fighting—still they could not hear. Her custom was to stir about as the hour approached—"any noise, bad or good,"—to pass off the sickening moments of suspense. The up-stage was frightfully irregular this stormy weather.

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On the stairs she encountered Moon, Chinese cook and high factotum of the household. He held the wet mail-pouch away from her skirt, but would not yield it to any hand but that of "boss."

"Stage heap late! No got garden-seed — say 'not up to him'; — big wash-out — Wyoming. — Can see for 'self in paper." Garden-seeds, nearly the whole of Mrs. Scarth's summer annuals, had gone astray; 'Gene Thompson, covering his own position in the matter, had asked (but this Moon did not repeat), "What in thunder she want to send way East for, anyway? Ain't ther' no nurs'ries in California good 'nough for her?"

Caroline followed the mail-bag, and Bran, much relieved, returned to his fire. There was no thin gray envelope with the blue Korean stamp. She threw off her coat and stood at the window, watching the same prospect, through the same blurring mist, the same intermittent showers of drops from blowing trees though the rain had ceased; a faint yellowish streak, low in the west, showed where another day was ending, precisely like the day before.

"We shall find," said Scarth, observing his wife's back, "that the boy's letters are held up in Tokio. They are stopping everything out of Korea, now the Japanese army is pushing through."

"Japan has not been pushing through all winter," she answered wearily.

"We'll get them all in a bunch after a while. There's a military censorship, you know. They have piles of stuff to go through."

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He opened the evening paper, handing her with a smile one of the new April magazines. With a smile she refused it, and came and looked over his shoulder instead. She alone was responsible for the theory that "none of these West Coast dailies appeal to me"; it was through no meekness on her part that the man always read them first. But these were special times, and to-night there was a special reason why he would have kept the paper from her if he could, — but of course he could n't; — the very item she was filching now over his shoulder would infallibly keep her awake till dawn.

"Danger to Americans in Korea. Our consul wired for a force of marines from U.S. gunboat at Chemulpo to protect life and property on American mining concession at Unsan. Ladies sent down with strong guard to Ping Yang."

If only Tom had been one of that strong guard, — but he was a hundred miles away in a separate province. If troops were called for at armed and garrisoned Unsan, how about lonely little Wiju!

Some of those newspaper young gentlemen who were not "at the front," disgusted because they could n't get there and tired of the Japanese official lie, had been working up rumors to make copy, which the home papers eagerly spread. And here was another shocker: —

"Three hundred Cossacks encamped on the Peking road. They have looted and occupied the village of Maibong. Native inhabitants all fled to the mountains."



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"Harry, Wiju is very near the Peking road, and Tom has only one white man!"

"The natives, my dear, are absolute sheep: of course they fled to the mountains. Cossacks are not officered by Cossacks — and what *is* a Cossack? — a very good fellow, according to Tolstoy."

"Oh, Tolstoy! — That was the Cossack at home; this is war!"

"It's Tom; that's what it is."

"Well, then, it is Tom." Her lips trembled. "I can't help it. Do you pretend that you are not anxious too?"

"It all sounds like poppy-cock to me," her wrathful comforter insisted. "They are not likely to go on scout by hundreds: fifty fellows, perhaps, on forage duty. If the people run away, they help themselves. They won't loot Uncle Sam much. As for marines mixing in — a nice mess that would kick up in the State Department."

"Who can tell what may be happening out there?"

"We know what's happening in Washington. The navy can't do that sort of thing without orders. — Come," he said, seeing that she pined just the same and his arguments wearied her, — "come, let's see about Wiju."

They had seen about Wiju, how often only the atlas knew, since Tom went off there "on his own," and made them so proud of his young responsibilities. Wiju, apparently, had not moved from its corner in the crooked yellow peninsula. While she hovered over the Peking road which appeared to be the only road



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in Korea, he, on the back of an envelope with a superior-pointed pencil, composed a cablegram to their son. It was getting to be time on several accounts the young man should be heard from.

He submitted it, and she thanked him rapturously, though it startled her a little to find that he shared her anxiety, after all.

"Could n't you simply say, 'Come home,' and leave out about 'work here if you want it?' I'm afraid he won't want it. You don't cable him about the work."

"Tom is a man," his father answered dryly; "I can't order him home."

Caroline assented with a pang of pride and apprehension. Yes, Tom was a man. There had been no need to push him out of the nest. The Korean job was his first offer, and he took it, of course, regardless of pay. He went off glorious on fifty the month, expenses, and passage out—and back, if he gave satisfaction and stuck his three years out. He set his teeth on the resolve that he would stick fast enough, if the Lord would let him.

Nice things were said about his work in course of time, which Cousin Tom heard in the company's office and took pains should reach the young man's parents. Cousin Tom was thoughtful in such ways; and it cheers the burdened rich to get another poor relation comfortably off their minds, aside from the satisfaction of seeing any young man make good in a world so full of failures.

But when Tom's contract was up, he did not come

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home and he did not renew — it had been preached to him by his sire that experience is “the road the younger son must tread” in the profession that is never learned and is always working itself out of a job.

“Experience is an engineer’s capital,” said Scarth, senior. “Make your foundation broad. You won’t stop to broaden once you begin to climb.” So Tom broadened on to irrigation, which can give as many falls as narrower things, with no more emoluments noticeably to the square mile of steady worry ; — and Cousin Tom disapproved in some alarm.

“I would n’t have him leave that company : they mean to do well by him. What does he want to run off for?”

“I expect he will do as he likes,” said his father, secretly tickled that the boy had done so, and asked advice afterwards — in the form of borrowing, by steamer-mail, his father’s best books on irrigation. Men with great fortunes in trust may be excused for hovering over the sons they are preparing for the burden : — not so the “light-runners” of this world. Tom’s opportunity had come from a native syndicate of rich Koreans who were putting a tunnel through a hill to lead water on to extensive rice-lands near Wiju ; — one of those broad, treeless valleys between sudden mountains, beautiful in its fertile isolation, floored with fields of rice and millet and beans, flocked over by cloud-shadows and troops of birds. — What a country to forage, what a trap for noncombatants between the advancing armies ! — voice of Tom’s mother in parenthesis.

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Here was the free hand which every builder loves and the ramifications of a work answering to the needs of a populous province — powers one could handle like a machine or grow up to like a man. Tom had seen how that was with his father who had to do with the people's bread. Besides, the amusing connection with silk-coated higher-ups of a mysterious race that tugged at your sympathies through its manifest doom to come. Nor was the salary in this case so negligible: the gentlemen in tortoise-shell spectacles invited him to name his price. They had broadened a little themselves, having started their tunnel with faith but no instruments; — the ends lost themselves somewhere in the heart of the hill. A narrow-eyed son of the syndicate employed as clerk of stores at Unsan, observing how Tom's "connections" worked out, imparted these wonders to whom they concerned, and the syndicate, through its discerning son, prostrated itself at the feet of Tom's tripod with the little telescope on top that could see through mountains.

"But does Tom know anything about irrigation?" asked Cousin Tom. "I thought he was going to be a mining-engineer."

"He's going to be an engineer, I hope," said Tom's father. "If he can't get onto this job he can mighty soon get off it — what he has to learn is, Can he handle men?"

Tom handled his Koreans and he called them men; there seemed no mystery about it. The method, whatever it was, resulted in tolerable efficiency,

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on their side, honesty as it goes (while they might be stealing the company's powder and candles), the gentlest manners, and a dog-like trust. On his, a curious growth of feeling where he had thought himself as cold as his own plumb-bob, — which none of his native assistants could learn should not rest on the ground in seeking a perpendicular. He did not know why it hurt him, and no one saw that it did, when his interpreter, Pak, quite the gentleman in European clothes, followed him, weeping into his cuffs, down the road between the millet-fields, when Tom turned his back upon his dreams of reputation in that little corner of the world.

For that had happened which one of his overdue letters might have warned them of at home; how the quiet of its opening sentences would have eased her nerves, if his mother could have read it in time! —

“The war I'm afraid is going to shut us down, and for a peculiar reason. We can't get money to pay our men. The Koreans will accept nothing but silver, which the banks refuse to give up. There is no currency in the country, and the people would rather go hungry than take pay in money they don't understand. They are so frightened, many of them will not plant crops, and the men are drawn off by the high pay they get as teamsters and carriers for the Japanese army. You can bet Japan pays for everything now! She's not stirring up bad blood behind her with the Ruskies in front.

“If I have to leave here, I shall go home by way of China, India, Port Said, and a few little side-shows

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like Singapore and London. It's the chance of a lifetime, what? Get out your map of the world, folks, and look for my home-pennon about July. — Might call it a visit, if there is anything left here to finish, after the war. It does n't look as if it could last long, but poor old Korea in any case will be jolly well 'gilt in de grush!' "

Two sentences in this letter underscored by the censor's pencil gave it to the flames.

## CHAPTER V

THE farmers' and ditch-men's rain cleared off cold, with a dash of hail and wind-clouds trooping out of a high, bare sky. Scarth had not been home to lunch, but he "hit it" just as the stage arrived, keeping up its winter habits. He had promised to speak to 'Gene himself about those garden-seeds.

"Moon will bring up your lunch," Caroline mentioned as she whisked through the chilly office. "I have a good fire upstairs."

She had given thought to that lunch. When her man missed a regular meal and came home tired and famished, the flesh must not be trifled with. He had never spared his flesh nor any part of him in the high necessities of his Work, but now he would "never see fifty again" — time to take in sail, as wisdom words it. When this means eating less than you want at every meal and avoiding most that you particularly enjoy, the wretch needs what support his family can give him ; at least his path need not be wantonly strewn with temptations. This is a very delicate duty for a wife to attempt ; wives are apt to put too much feeling into it. A cook can help, but good cooks are more often in league with the arch-enemy, appetite. This was the hitch with Moon. They had had him so long ; they liked him so well ; they were bound to him in the fatal chains of habit.



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And Moon had habits too: he could not change. His cooking was "great" for young adventurers on the high seas of digestion, but for those who creep along the graveyard routes, Moon's accredited list offered dangers worse than icebergs wrapped in fog.

It was hard for the poor Old Thing, his mistress owned it mournfully. Dishes he had erst been lauded for, and had built up an envied reputation on, were now discouraged or mutely set aside; or the mistress would come into Moon's kitchen and plead with him not to serve the same again without special orders.

"'Special order!'" How many years had the mistress gone her ways and Moon his? — she had hardly known what was for dinner in her own house; and now it was, "'Moon, please *not* this — please not that?'" — Too muchee all time talk: meals plenty good."

However, there could be no quarrel with that tray. Creamed sweetbreads (a left-over but none the worse for that) on rounds of fresh-made toast — pastry being taboo; cold chicken garnished with Moon's beautiful early lettuce, which he raised himself, and in one leaf nestled a serving of that most innocuous salad, apple and spaghetti. Finally, to show herself wisely human, Caroline had added the last insignificant section of a ripe Sierra cheese; — Scarth treated it as a specimen, and studied it through his curved palm as if to assist the naked eye in locating it on his plate. Caroline smiled, but she did not apologize. And there was tea which she would drink herself, — coffee was anathema. The man had drunk

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gallons of it, black; sooner than trifle with dilute imitations he let the cup pass from him. Hot water was his ironic beverage in these days.

Upon all this peace with honor comes Moon bumping in importantly without knocking. He set down on the hearth a pair of kitchen-plates carried in a clean dish-towel, whisked off the top plate and looked at "boss."

"Col' day. Hot saush' heap good."

Mrs. Scarth gazed in horror: four rich, brown cakes of pork sausage, sparkling with fat—the peculiar weakness of man! This was no common butcher-stall blend: the recipe came down with the sanction of four generations from a Rhode Island great-grandmother of Quaker memory. There was perhaps only one thing better and more deadly in that Quaker cook-book, — which was Caroline's great-grandmother's mince pies. These deceits of the flesh were still practiced for hospitality's sake and because Christmas is Christmas, even in California, where Nature's all the year bounty makes ridiculous the huge winter provisioning of our ancestors.

Moon stood at gaze, completely happy: who could snub him! Caroline smiled feebly. "I hardly think he will care for the sausage, Moon. *You* eat him — you like sausage?"

"Moon eat that sausage? — not much!" shouts boss in the voice of great cheer Moon loved. — "Chicken and sausage — I guess not!"

Moon retired chuckling: "Heap good — boss heap hungry. Big man — mus' eat!"

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He had fore-reached on the mistress this time; futile person who messed with cook-books and listened to a fool doctor. Moon knew that if he could but catch one little wood-pussy and send the creature's heart down city to China doctor there, boss might be cured of those devilish pains at night which set the look of death on his handsome features.

But they were all crazy (clazy), white women and their doctors, and they talk-talk — when boss not there — “‘not eat this — not eat that’ — foo! look at boy, look at girl, look at lady 'self! Eat same thing — no get sick. Big man *mus'* eat: no can live on je-e-ly!” — those pitiful aspics the mistress wasted good meat on, which boss and Moon despised!

Moon felt what a greater than many Moons has said, in man's charity for man: “Men of this arterial blood cannot live on nuts, herb-tea, and elegies. They are made for war, for the sea, for mining, hunting, and clearing, huge risks and the joy of adventurous living.”

That was her man: Caroline knew his type and exulted in it out of the heart of her groaning fears. But we may be sure she did not read that passage in her Emerson to *her* man of arterial blood; she needed it — he did not. She must take the boss as God made him. They would have a night of it: meanwhile, there he lay in the pride of fresh transgression, feeding chicken-bones to Bran, another arterial sinner: “An old dog *can* eat chicken-bones — he knows how.” The question came up regularly on chicken-days, Caroline confident that Bran would die of a

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sliver crossways, Scarth taking glorious chances, as with himself.

Having finished his bones, Bran climbed up with them all inside and squeezed down behind Scarth's legs. He turned his warty cheek away like a bashful maid, when offered a sniff of his master's cigar, but swallowed the insult, and presently there was great peace between the three,—man, woman, and beast, as in the first paradise. Though we have tasted of temptation, the Lord has not called us yet in the voice of great pains in the middle of the night.

"Here is a letter from Anna ; I wonder how I came to miss it !" Caroline picked it out eagerly from Scarth's heap of business envelopes. He opened his eyes, having just dropped off.

"—Want me to read it to you? Anna writes such nice letters."

"Go ahead," said Scarth resignedly.

The letter began as usual—the part most men omit when they write letters ; — "I am glad you have cabled Tom to come home. I think you are very wise to do so, both on his account and yours."

"I never *said* we had cabled him to come home," Caroline broke off to protest ; she was annoyed because she had so nearly said so and the difference had been lost on her friend.

"It does n't matter," said Scarth.

"Why, it does ! you particularly did not wish to order him home."

"They thought I ought to, so it comes to the same thing," he answered drowsily.

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Mrs. Scarth read on ; her face underwent a series of slight but expressive changes. Cousin Anna's letters ordinarily were plain sailing : she answered a letter as she would make a call. There was never anything in them to regret, seldom anything to remember. In this case some concern on her mind had moved her to speak with unusual force and earnestness. The effect, though warm, was somewhat disturbing : Caroline immediately asked herself, "What have *I* been saying?"

"It is mostly about you," she faltered.

"Me!"

"Your health."

"What does she know about my health?"

"I'm sorry I ever said anything. Naturally she exaggerates what little I did say."

Scarth smiled. His wife was much too sincere, and often too excited a talker to be able to hear herself talk, or to measure the force of her own expressions. A double distillation of the truth appeared to be reacting now upon its author.

"Everything we do seems to them so ill-advised —"

"As we state it, perhaps. Come, I have heard you talk to Anna. Don't tell me she does all the exaggerating."

"I cannot make Anna see that I could no more live her life than she could live mine."

"But you could, you know ; and Anna would make a first-class poor man's wife."

"You are mistaken — about me ; but that is n't the question."



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"What's Anna been doing?" asked Scarth, who was very fond of Mrs. Cousin Tom.

"I'm not talking of Anna—Anna is perfectly sweet and dear, but she is almost too well-bred. She keeps her gilded side too carefully out of my sight. She has got outside things to talk about; it would amuse me very much to hear about her life, and not dazzle me beyond endurance; but she makes *me* do the first person, and it's a bad plan. I've only inside things to talk of; and when I laugh over our scram's, she thinks it is my wonderful pluck and endurance, carrying it off. And sometimes she misunderstands so completely that I am confounded. So I sit up and explain, and then we get in deeper."

Scarth treated all this as introductory and withheld comment; he was not in fact wholly awake.

"She cannot understand my life because it's your life, and you she never will understand, for she knows you only through Cousin Tom."

"Who expects to be understood? Trying to explain only makes matters worse."

"But it's inhuman not to want your friends to understand; and when you feel yourself partly responsible, you want to take back something—" Caroline ended weakly.

"You can take back your husband: leave the old man out of your tales."

"But he's the beginning and the end of my tales. I'd like to know if I ever do anything that isn't founded in some way on you?"

"Well, what's the row about?"



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"No row at all. I've been describing to Anna some of our queer trips together. I was too realistic, it seems. She doesn't see, to begin with, why I go with you at all to such places, when it's only business and I've been over the roads so many times before."

"Well, why should she see?"

"— Because I am thin and nervous, and she sees that I'm anxious sometimes, she thinks I am all run down; and because I told her once about the room we slept in at Brandy City" — Caroline broke off to laugh — "she imagines my life is all one Brandy City. She asks herself why I do it, and she asks me!"

"Then it's you she is worrying about?"

"Yes — till I really had to explain."

"Explain?"

"Yes, dear; women do explain — to those they care for, whom they know they can trust. No woman likes to be thought a nuisance, tagging after her husband, — afraid to let him go anywhere alone. It looks, don't you see, like a want of confidence in the man himself."

"Come, now, Carrie! Anna is a lady."

"I assure you things transpire without a word, between two who understand each other."

"You've just said she never could understand —"

"I said she overshot the mark. She is surrounded with it — they are surprised at nothing. I really could not bear the inference I saw shaping itself in her mind. Not that they would n't condone it — but

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I will not be pitied for *that*! So I told her there was a constant fear — those turns we dread so. And the wretched food at those places which is poison to you. Even if I can't help, I must know — ”

They were past laughter now, though Caroline's halting confession had been attended with sufficient mirth to prove them still friends.

“I don't fancy your telling her that.” Scarth sat up rather hard-eyed, but his voice had not changed.

“I knew you would hate it,” she mourned, “and I hated most awfully to tell you. But how could I stand her sympathy, and her admiration for the way I bear it!”

“Bear what? Come, out with it!”

“That you drink too much, in short, — if I'm not with you. That's what she pities me for; that's why they are so relieved to hear we have cabled to Tom!”

“I see,” said Scarth grimly. “Old man breaking up; — strain of looking after him getting too much for the little mother all alone.”

“But read the letter,” Caroline grieved. “She is a dear friend. She's the only woman I ever talk to — she's the only woman I've had, absolutely, since the spring they came up here and I fell in love with her on the spot! She keeps things separate; she is loyal — she never speaks of what she would n't have spoken of — ”

“Well, well; I believe you,” said Scarth. “You need n't apologize for either of you, desperate characters as you are.”

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But there was a point still left to make, perhaps the most difficult of all. "Anna is constantly thinking of others. She is tired this spring, and yet she is planning to have us there when we go down to meet Tom."

"Did any one say we were going down to meet Tom?"

"But we are, and we shall stay with them, of course. I love it when we are both there; you and Cousin Tom are so funny together! But what does it matter when people have such kind hearts and are so interested? Anna begs me to persuade you to see one of the big surgeons, when you are down; — have a thorough examination!"

"That, of course, we can't discuss," said Scarth, rising, a dark color in his face. He stood back to the fire and looked beyond her sternly. Outsiders who saw him seldom had begun to observe changes in his countenance, lines and lapses, pallor with discoloration; — signs a physician reads at a glance.

He had smiled over that other form of condolence which she found unbearable, but now he did not smile.

"I shall see a surgeon, after Tom comes back — after I have seen him; not before."

"But the risks" — she released a deep breath and looked at him timidly — "going on so, in the dark!"

"There are risks the other way."

"Yes," she murmured.

"If I put myself in Symington's hands I shall expect to go through with it. I must see the boy first."

## CHAPTER VI

IT was the 29th of March, and you would have known that spring had come in Wiju by the troops of babies, mostly naked, playing in its mud-walled streets — little brown babies who creep out of sight like flies in winter and are not seen again till the sun warms their bare bellies, and ice on glazed puddles can be broken by a baby toe.

Tom might have mentioned, — but for some reason he did not, — in one of those letters which never got past Tokio, that so far from being alone in Wiju with one white man, he had had the company since January of two agreeable ladies, the wife and pretty daughter of one of our missionaries in Korea.

It is probably known that most of them are laborers in the cheerful vineyards around Seoul, yet there is no idealistic calling that does not attract a few genuine idealists to its lonelier paths, and our Mr. Gladwyn was one of these. He may have been a provoking saint in many ways, still he was a saint, and his was the faith for which men die to the sense of meaner obligations. He sacrificed others as cheerfully as himself, and honored his wife with her full share in the hardships of his wildest pilgrimages, where she added her medical to his evangelical help. It was in some isolated hamlet, a day or two's travel from Wiju, that they were caught at the clos-

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ing of winter ; rumors of Russian soldiery scattered his little flock ; he brought down his women to the engineers' cantonment, and went back himself to round them up among the graves of their kindred in the high places. So, although in no danger from Cossacks as Cossacks, it was due to those parties of the broad-faced fellows roaming about that Tom was finally exposed to a much more serious peril, all that winter of war's alarms.

If his mother could have looked in upon them in Wiju and have seen him photographing Korean babies, with Mary Gladwyn laughing and helping to keep them still ; or that utter stranger, Mrs. Gladwyn, domiciled with her knitting in her son's quarters, his only spare chair drawn up to the lamp with Mary in it reading aloud in a voice as sweet as an English girl's and with something of an English accent to prove her a cosmopolitan, the lamplight falling on her remarkable head of hair, I think there might have been restless nights just the same for a mother who was looking for an angel to mate with her son, and saw no particular hurry even for her.

Though Mary might be related to saints and their works, she was not in training for sainthood herself, nor was the wonderful hair angelic in color, if we may trust the ancient popular prejudice. As to the arrangement which looked so intimate, Mrs. Gladwyn had settled all that on a strict business basis as the first condition of accepting (or perhaps one should say claiming) Tom's hospitality. As we have said, she was a medical missionary — in Tom's secular opinion



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much the best sort. Mary, whose mission had not announced itself, kept busy and gay in the character of a pretty girl fond of one's mother, and helping that wise woman nurse the sick and unsanitated villagers and coax a few gifts of clothing upon their babies at the hands of the gentle, apathetic mothers. The fourth member of this beleaguered little family could hardly be admitted to the social proposition so far as the younger lady was concerned, and need not be dwelt upon. Tom's one white man, Kelsey, had his uses; he was cheap, but his habits were not warranted to keep in an Oriental climate.

Miss Mary did not quite fathom her young host. He looked like a boy, and to her experience of alien folk and fashions, he seemed as ingenuous as one just out of a nice old country home, yet his position implied several forms of capacity not common in boys; he had a certain freezing look and a grim, significant silence that acted like a charm upon Kelsey's occasional bursts of "freshness," and the natives (the Gladwyns spoke Korean) swore by his brief administration as by their very gods, and doubtless understood about as much of its mysterious workings.

"I never see or find that who is so kind like Mr. Scarth since I have known the foreigners," Pak would gossip, airing his punctilious English to Mrs. Gladwyn. "I am sure I cannot forget him my gratitude before I die."

Tom's four years had been that steady grind, working always at his top efficiency, which a man is equal to when he is young. It is a good grind and he will



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remember it ever afterwards with satisfaction, especially if he gets little credit for it at the time. He had got into the general swing of the work at Unsan, making the rounds of the concession monthly to measure up, give levels — whatever it is the man with the transit generally does — traversing the valley pony-back, his house-boy riding on top of his master's stuff:—hard work, but a great many amusing personal luxuries for a tall young American supposed to be able to lace his own boots and put in his own studs and get wet if he forgets his mackintosh. Very spoiled he will be, with a house-boy to pack his clothes, fetch his tea before he knows that he wants it, and watch that no other unprincipled house-boy steals from his own master's stock of neckties and small change. He had hoped to leave things at Wiju in a shape that might praise the work long after the worker was forgotten. That dream the war broke up — remained, the journey home around the rest of the world, to compensate. It fairly stung in his blood, thoughts of a ship's deck once more, even a little Japanese coaster to Shanghai; the boat service was at sixes and sevens owing to the war; but after Shanghai, the P. & O., the cities of the sandaled feet, the procession of humanity in living gestures and colors of all the types since creation's dawn.

The river was open now as far as Ping Yang, but our party was a journey of six days inland. The date had been set for starting, and Mr. Gladwyn had come in to bid his family farewell. On this second visit he

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struck Tom as even more vague and inapplicable to general uses than memory had recorded him. However, Mr. Gladwyn could well afford to spare his young compatriot's approval; some other things he seemed to set aside among the non-essentials with equal unconcern, and far be it from us to say he was not right;—still it may have been embarrassing for Mrs. Gladwyn. Tom imagined from certain evidences that she suffered chagrin, when the hour of parting came and her good man simply thanked him for his hospitality and pocketed the rest of the obligation as a matter of course between gentlemen and countrymen. Tom naturally would have preferred it so, but he remembered the lady's insistence and knew she was depressed.

The size of an average Korean pony makes a six-foot American bestriding him appear as a monster to many—Tom's center-board, as it were, was within three inches of grounding. Kelsey shortened his stirrups and rode with knees drawn up like a jockey. The ladies were carried in stuffy curtained chairs—Mrs. Gladwyn's soft heart insisting on four bearers apiece for a journey of that length. The nature of Korean inns being known to them, they took their own bedding and their own chow, which necessitated a cook. With all this retinue and baggage, white men armed, house-boys and chair-coolies in numbers to indicate deceptively travelers of wealth, they could not fail to attract much unsought notice on the road of war. For sixty miles they were coasting along the Japanese advance, held up at intervals by polite little officers

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who asked them prettily, "Where did you going?" Sometimes they spoke French, and Tom labored through amazing idioms sooner than annex Miss Mary's help; though nothing in sedan chairs could have escaped that very thorough military envisagement.

There was no style about their march, to match the work cut out for these little soldiers going up against white regulars for the first time in history. Their cavalry was a "sight." Large bodies of sappers and miners gave themselves frankly the appearance of an army of truck-peddlers pushing their two-wheeled carts; following them came a sort of flying commissariat in place of the enormous baggage-train that forms the tail of a European advance. But if you asked one of those little cart-pushers, "Where are you going?" he answered, fatalistically, "To Mukden" — ironic laughter of Circassians in the background.

Who would not have prophesied an old-fashioned romance on a journey such as this? Tom did wisely, perhaps, to give his parents no room for speculation: it is doubtful if he could have convinced his mother, at least, how far his thoughts were from marriage, as he rode by the side of Miss Mary's litter like a knight of old (neither did knights necessarily marry the ladies they protected on those mediæval wanderings). It had struck him, however, that fate would be remarkably kind if these ladies should happen to be aboard ship on that first lap of his long voyage home. Incidentally, he would say to himself: "What a shame! What a thousand pities!"

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This, no doubt, referred to his one confidential talk with Miss Mary. She had had her own plans, it appeared, right along, and had been pursuing them under her parents' very noses. And now she sprung the secret upon them, since the war had disarranged their own plans. It was her ambition to train for a nurse under English doctors or in an English hospital in Hongkong. Hence, we suppose, the silent outcry in Tom's mind when he looked at that glorious head of red-gold hair and thought of the "plain distinguishing cap." Those caps are frequently becoming, but that is not why they are worn, and at Miss Mary's age to be pretty seems a right and natural end in itself. He saw the admirable carriage of her short and supple back, and thought of it bending for hours over the beds of pain. Are such young spines made only for the saddle, the music-bench, the ball-room? Why did he grudge those grimmer exercises only to youth and beauty? Ask the patients if pretty looks and graceful forms are wasted in a sick-room. Ask any one who has had the training of girls, if the stooping, plain-featured, charmless ones are those only who keep their minds on their work. It looked as if Tom were not quite unbiased in his protest, but, as to any personal influence he might bring to bear to save this bright and bonny girl from the mill which grinds all flesh alike, no such thought occurred to him.

Naturally, on such a journey, there could be few opportunities for confidential talk, supposing any young person had desired to acquaint himself with

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another's state of mind in view of the world-end parting before them. Finality, in this case, might have been guarded against, but not in any guarded manner—not in Miss Mary's present mood. Her wicked, worldly pride was a hard lump to swallow.

"Has father his address?" she asked her mother, significantly.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Gladwyn tersely. "I wish you had not dragged it out of me, Mary; you don't have to know these things."

"I do if you do."

"I made the arrangement myself and I shall keep it, give me time. I was foolish to expect father would have anything to spare when he came down. In fact, I had to divide with him. He sees so much hopeless suffering; if a little money here and there can help, how can he hold his hand?"

"Oh, mother, he's a lamb, but does n't he fill you with despair, sometimes?"

"Not at all," said Mrs. Gladwyn. "You are the one who has most upset my plans. I shall not let you go to Hongkong alone—don't think it! We can't live there for what we could in Ping Yang. At least we can't take the risks—"

"I see," said Mary. "And now I revile you for not paying your bills! But why can't we get the money in Ping Yang?"

"I have my reasons why." Possibly Mary understood: her father's disposition did not fit him for "team-work," and he was unpopular with the accredited heads of departments because he liked



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not too many orders and seldom obeyed them exactly.

"Then at Seoul? Mrs. Bruce would let you have it in a second."

"I don't propose to borrow of my hostess and my friend."

"There are all sorts of pride!" said Mary bitterly.

"Leave me alone till we get to Hongkong. I will borrow it there in a businesslike manner."

"Are you sure he is going with us to Hongkong?"

"I think so. Poor boy! how he would blush to be taxed with his bread and butter at this rate."

"We could swallow his bread and butter, but paying for house-boys and chair-coolies — that's too much!"

"It shall all be settled before we part."

"But wont you just mention it meanwhile — to show we have n't forgotten?"

"I don't see the necessity."

"Oh, well! he'll lay it to our being 'missionaries' — it won't surprise him any."

"Why do you speak in that way?"

"Because Mr. T. L. Scarth does n't think very much of evangelical work among the heathen, I fancy."

"How did you get that idea?"

"He did n't force it on me, naturally: I gathered it from one or two playful little tilts we've had."

"He should n't be blamed too much for his prejudices: he has very likely listened to tales about us in the treaty ports — and many of them are only too true."

"Oh, he believes in the likes of you! — anything

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for their bodies and minds ; and he can't see why Confucian Analects are not perfectly good moral guides for the average heathen."

"And they end with this world. If you ask a Confucian about immortality, he will say : 'When the master was questioned on that, he answered, "If you do not understand life, how can you understand death?"'"

"The worst he ever said to me was that our converts were the weak and the hypocritical and the self-seeking!"

"Did you remind him of those ten thousand Protestant and thirty thousand Catholic converts massacred in the Boxer revolution — who could have saved their lives, most of them, by stamping on a piece of paper with *Jesus* written on it?"

"Oh, mother dear, I did not argue with him : he's too modern for us."

"There is my despair! When men like this boy, — the best they can send out here, — stainless, upright, clever, honorable in every way, think they can afford to disdain our teaching, — what can we hope of the heathen? The East will never accept a cast-off faith the West has outgrown!"

Mary was silent.

"Was that the reason why you are so bitter about our indebtedness?"

"Possibly," she said. "You have always accused me of sordid pride."

"It would be pleasanter, certainly, if he were one of ourselves and not a scoffer."

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"He is n't as bad as that. I tell you, he makes an exception of us — of you ; the way our English friends do when they say, ' We never should have taken *you* for Americans.' "

Mrs. Gladwyn barely smiled. "I have wondered, sometimes, whether I did do right : — two missionaries in one family ! Keeping my own practice might have made things easier ; it might even have given us more to help with. But it would have separated us from your father ; and I 'm not more than an average safe doctor — safe for Koreans who pull through anything. You must be a better nurse than I am a doctor, Mary. I ought to have been a nurse ; that is about my measure."

"Hear her !" said Mary : — "as if she had n't taught me a lot. I expect to be taking cases inside of two years — consequence of your teachments right along and the things you have made me do. Do you hear that, old lady ? I shall be earning money myself, and don't you worry any more about Miss Hardinge : *that* debt shall be paid ! As it was for me, anyhow, what more proper ? "

"I want you to remember, Miss Hardinge was always beautiful about it. She said the girls whose fathers like yours were in better business than money-making were the girls she wanted in the school, and she would have had you stay as an honor-pupil — that was her nice way of putting it — but the school has no foundation for scholarships ; it would have been simply a gift from her. No ; it all came of my own worldliness, choosing that school."

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"I thought it was grandma's little legacy."

"Of course, we could not have dreamed of it without — and then came the panic year, and stocks went down —"

"Yes, I know," said Mary, shrinking from this oft-told tale of humiliation and mistaken expense. Mrs. Gladwyn had seldom made a mistake of this kind, and it went hard with her to forgive herself.

"Miss Hardinge owned I was probably right: poor men's daughters may be useful companions for rich men's, but the conjunction bears rather hard on the girls who have to support the character of virtuous poverty. . . . I never could understand, though, about the girl who told it all over the school after she wormed it out of you!"

"Oh, mother! you've got that *all* wrong. She did n't worm it in the least. She was a child almost, and I was very fond of her. She found me crying and I was just upset enough to tell her why. She was thunderstruck: — a girl, one of themselves as it were, suddenly having to leave school because — well; it was all perfectly natural, anyhow, and I don't know how you ever got the idea that I was hurt by that! And she did n't 'tell it all over the school': she told just one girl — who happened to particularly hate that kind of gossip and, poor kid, they made it hard enough for her!"

"Well, no matter: I thought it a miserable incident, and I supposed she must have been one of the rich Jews — they would naturally have a scorn of insolvency."

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"Her people belong to the High Tong in San Francisco; and, moreover, she confessed to her mother, and that good lady went to Miss Hardinge and offered to pay my school bills past and to come: — she was one who did believe in missionaries! Surely I told you all that?"

"Perhaps you did," said Mrs. Gladwyn. "I don't care about any of it, if — when Miss Hardinge is paid! Then we'll agree to forget it."

A deep color overspread Mary's face. "Mother, why were *you* so proud about accepting help from her — if you can take it so calmly from a perfect stranger — when we practically asked for it?"

"What would you have me do, for mercy's sake?"

"Pay him at Seoul — borrow it of Mrs. Bruce, on your personal note, if necessary."

"Mrs. Bruce would laugh at my note! I will borrow it of a bank in the only proper way."

"I'm glad to hear," said Mary, "that we've got money at interest in Hongkong!"

"Leave that to me, if you please! . . . Child, what is the matter with you?"

Mary sat up closer to her mother and grasped one of her hands; their backs hid the gesture. "Now you know why I can't — *can't* follow in the footsteps of my blessed parents. I've just got to be sordid and take my pay!"

"I have guessed it for a long time, dear; that's why I wanted you to see just what a nurse's life demands. And I wanted to test your strength under my own eyes. But now I am not sorry I dragged



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you through the operating-room drill, and made you cook for my sick, and change their bandages. You won't stop long in the first stage of your work. — But — don't sit that way, please!"

They were resting after a wayside meal; Mary, cramped from long hours in a swaying chair, had stretched her feet out comfortably before her. Mrs. Gladwyn, who performed surgical operations, could not accustom herself (these things being all a matter of early training) to the casual exhibition of a young woman's ankles; Mary laughed at her and she laughed at herself in Mary's eyes. Her smile remained when Tom strolled up, smiling too, — the guilty grin of one who turns a camera upon a friend.

Mary buried her nose in her teacup and defied him, — not that her nose was a perilous feature; but Mrs. Gladwyn, who had a nose if you like, faced him with middle-aged hardihood, smile and all, and Tom incontinently took her. He repented the deed long after, when his mother, inspecting the print, remarked dryly, "I thought you said Mrs. Gladwyn was a lady!"

Certainly it looked as if they had buried the ghosts of past humiliations or drowned them in those gypsy cups of tea. Mrs. Gladwyn packed her teapot in its wadded wicker basket, Mary washed the handleless Korean bowls. Eating out of brass sounds unappetizing, but they were used to it; the country held no surprises for them. They had worn off its shocks and its fascination as well: even the extraordinary pageant, which accompanied them hour after hour, of the

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Japanese army in extended profile draping the middle distance, drew but an occasional over-shoulder glance while they reckoned journey expenses and discussed their own teasing personalities ; nor would they be more excited at nightfall when by main strength of their combined escort they were pushed through the crowded gateway of some little old walled town swarming with chattering natives racially clad, or Japanese soldiers, looking more racial still in French fatigue caps and American shoes.

That which had first struck Tom about these ladies was their homely likeness to all the nicest women he had known ; not the smartest, yet Mary was smart. To those who have an eye and an ear, a bird of the air may carry the matter. The obvious thing about Miss Mary was not her speaking acquaintance with three Chinese dialects, but the charming way she did her hair. Because life for her was real and earnest, she travailed for dainty *lingerie*, and while fitting herself to walk the chambers of life and death, she preferred to do it agreeably shod. You cannot make your own shoes as you can your some other things ; — occasionally she spent money on her pretty pettitoes which should have gone, we fear, into the treasury of the Lord, saying she would save it somewhere else, which, no doubt, she did, for she had a head quite equal to it.

There were so many things about her which tantalized Tom on his home-making side, that more than once he asked himself, as the journey drew toward a close, were there not opportunities here a

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man might think of and regret when it was too late?

"If I were to come back," — his thoughts ran ahead into one of many futures on the different roads a man may choose, while his choice is still his own, — "what a life we could make of it together!" — A girl so home-like, so home-trained, yet a rover with gypsy eyes and wide horizons in her ken. "She knows the East — the 'monstrous, shambling' East — and she *is* the West. We'd get on grandly at Wiju." — Poor little Wiju! How that place haunts a boy which has owned his first authority, taken the impress, however transitory, of his young creative hand.

He did not swear to his pillow nightly that not another sun should set ere she had listened to his tale. He was not sure that he had any tale to tell. But, if it should "work out that way," it were more likely to "come off" on shipboard. Three days to Shanghai and a day more to wait in that city of devilom, as seen from the Bubbling-Well Road. He gazed at the cold young April moon and cast up her changes: she would be in her third quarter at Seoul and sailing at the full over the Yellow Sea.

Did he wish to go home an engaged man? At least he was ready to toy with the possibility: whether it would ever be anything more might depend at this stage on how Miss Mary looked at it.

## CHAPTER VII

"MUST it be a black dress for your mother? Is she wearing black?"

"No," said Tom; "but if it's black, you know, she can't give it to Engracia."

"I see." Mary grasped the idea, beaming; she was by way of knowing that kind of mother herself. They were walking the windy streets of Seoul in and out of native shops, choosing Tom's gifts for home. He had asked her assistance in this errand, but it was not that only which gave them a sudden sense of intimacy fraught with the delicate pain of parting.

"Is your mother an out-of-doorsy mother?" Mary asked.

"Oh, very. She goes about everywhere with the old man."

"The 'pater'?" She played her English against his colloquial American.

"Yes; he and the 'mater' ride all over the shop."

"Does she take great care of her complexion?"

Tom stared and laughed: "Oh, dear, no! I never saw any signs of it."

"Then it cannot be black," said Mary, "if I know the sun of California. Now, let us think a bit." They were looking at embroidered crêpes and chiffons, and Mary held up one of the latter lovingly, but Tom inclined to the richer, more substantial stuffs.

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"Suppose we don't get a white for your sister? What is the color of her eyes?"

"Blue," said Tom.

"But what do you call blue — like yours, for instance?" The little Korean salesman who watched them suddenly lowered his own eyes.

"Has she much color? — is she fair?" Mary gained in color herself as she passed on hurriedly.

"She comes home fair after a winter in New York, but she gets bravely over it before she goes back again."

"Here is a blue: — would n't that go with your sister's eyes?"

"Would you call that blue?"

"It's the blue that makes blue eyes — what you call blue eyes — look really blue. These people know."

"Not much about blue eyes." Tom smiled at her subtleties.

"Well, if you think that fixes your sister, — it must be made with *just* a touch of red — perhaps a dark red rose tucked in somewhere, but she will know all about that, — then we can choose a white for your mother."

"White!" Tom echoed helplessly.

"She does wear white?"

"Oh, yes — at home; but I can't remember her in a white dress in San Francisco. I'm sure she'd give it to Engracia."

Mary turned over the crêpes again in silence. "Look; here is a white like old churned foam; my own mother could wear that, and she's no swan. It will go in a suitcase and shake out without a mark;



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and for less than you could dream you might get her the most adorable scarf to soften those dressmaker lines — ”

Tom stood bewildered, smiling, and Mary waived the decision with a word to the shopman : the two dress-patterns were laid aside.

“ Now, if you want to be reckless, get your mother one of these black embroidered chiffons ; she can put mauve or white under it, and if she is anything like my mother she won’t want another dinner-dress for six years.”

Tom agreed that sounded very like his mother ; but, he added, “ I want that for Cousin Anna.”

“ Cousin Anna ? ” Mary put one finger to her brow : “ How many more ladies are we shopping for ? I must n’t get them mixed.”

Tom laughed, and the gentle little salesman smiled in sympathy, though he was much depressed by Mary’s acquaintance with all things Korean, especially prices.

“ Cousin Anna Ludwell,” Tom explained simply.

“ Of San Francisco ? ”

“ Very much so. Father’s cousins. Great people for doing things.”

“ Yes,” said Mary, after another silence ; “ I should think that might do for ” — she paused — “ look at this embroidery, all by hand, and yards and yards of flouncing — hemstitched ; of course, no one uses flouncing, but there are ways of working it in.”

“ Cousin Anna would n’t look very closely at the flouncing : she gets the idea — ”

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"Which sounds," said Mary with a peculiar little tired drawl, "as if your cousin must be very nice and very fond of you."

"You are certainly right about her: at least, I've never seen anything nicer than Cousin Anna."

"Have they a daughter who used to go to Miss Hardinge's?"

"They have a daughter, Clare. I don't know where she went to school."

"There was a Clare Ludwell — one of the younger girls — a day-pupil at Miss Hardinge's when I was there four years ago."

"Were you?" Tom passed over the negligible clause. "I had no idea you knew San Francisco."

"Oh, I did n't: I only knew the school, and I saw a few San Francisco girls."

"How long were you there?"

Mary colored. "It's absurd for me to talk to you about your San Francisco: any one can see how you love it."

"I did n't love it when I left there; it rather grows on you."

"Well; San Francisco has never grown on me much."

"Then I should say you did *not* know it. It is a haunting city when you have once hit the spell; it 'calls' you, as they say of the East."

"Goodness!" said Mary with open scorn for his comparison; "you must have 'hit' some spell very hard, in that hardest city I have ever known!"

It was Tom who colored this time: "I see we must

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agree to differ about San Francisco, for the present. I'd like most awfully to meet you there some day, and convert you."

"I'm in no hurry for that day!" said Mary tartly. "It would be too absurd," she spoke up again, controlling her flash of temper, "for us to quarrel about a city neither of us belongs to, and one of us will never see again, it is n't likely."

"Two negatives? you *will* see it again — that is my prophecy."

"Any old prophecy will do in my case," said Mary languidly.

The little brown salesman took in the foreign situation discreetly, and busied his slender hands refolding his stuffs. Mary checked him.

"Shall it be the sea-foam white, then, for your mother — or must we agree to disagree in everything?"

"Anything you say goes," Tom answered simply.

She had thought that she could not get over the choke of his bread-and-butter in her throat, but as they walked homeward in silence, she was sensible of a harder lump to swallow. What horrid behavior she had shown; how incredibly silly and bad-tempered he must think her. Was she actually jealous of this boy's home past with its attachments and preferences made before he ever saw her? An old homesickness of her own awoke for which there was no cure. She might call herself an American — as a fact she had no country and no home. This young man had kept himself remarkably to himself, which

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did not mean necessarily that he had been a blank page before he came to quaint, outlandish Korea and met these missionary Gladwyns. As to his favors, thank goodness, they were able to make some return : first, through the hospitality of old friends who had snatched them on their far-heralded arrival at Seoul, a charming English couple who made them free of their house, which was a house well worth visiting for its own sake.

It stood in the old quarter, close to the city wall. A garden, exotic England, cast its wonderful ivies over a section of this wall and draped the carved-stone seat beneath ; masses were cut away yearly because of dampness, but new sprays were always fingering the ancient carvings ; monstrous symbolic heads thrust forth and peered down the long, espaliered walk that divided the garden. Inside, there were no traveler's poses : you sat on cushions on the matted floors if you preferred, but there were chairs and lounges ; you could smoke "Egyptian Deities" or "Bull Durham" or a slender Korean pipe holding a thimbleful, and preciously inlaid with silver, and you had your tub at any hour and plenty of hot water. There were no young people. Mr. and Mrs. Bruce adored Mary. The mothers exchanged one look and the tall, silent young American, with a boyish absence of manner but a look of power, was asked to dinner, and to tiffin next day, previous to an afternoon's shopping.

It gratified Mary, on their speechless homeward stroll, to reflect on the bargains she had secured for

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her trusting companion. I am not sure but she may have saved him the better part of that wretched board-bill outright, for he would have been an easy mark. Her few words in fluent Korean caused prices to tumble in a manner mournful for little brown salesmen, who had seen them enter with high hopes.

How fondly it adds to the value of an experience when we think of it as past and gone. Home affairs absorbed Tom immediately upon his return, and those who would have been his delighted listeners and have drawn him out, were deep with him in matters closer to the family life than this alien chapter; it remained peculiarly his own and gained a touch of melancholy from that sense of lost values imperfectly felt at the time. Thousands of miles from Seoul and its chill April sunsets, he would see that English garden inside the Mongol wall; smell the damp of its winter ivies mingled with the scent of sprouting box and the night incense of humanity in an old Asiatic town.

There was no one to tea but themselves, and they had it in the garden. When the smart house-boy, in long blue coat and trousers reefed at the ankles, had taken his tray and left them, they stood up on the seat to see out over the wall toward the Peking road where it runs straight into the north: the old ambassadors' highway when Korea paid tribute to China's emperors hundreds of dark decades before the Manchu dynasties. A memorial arch spans the road at this entrance, commemorating the virtues of some good



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and learned man who remembered the poor, several dozen centuries before the restless race arose which sent these young barbarians hither.

They planted their elbows in the ivy and gazed before them long in silence. Tom took a paper from his notebook and spread it under Mary's eyes.

"A cable — from —?"

"Home," said Tom. "I found it at the consul's — delayed, of course."

His manner was singularly quiet, but Mary was not deceived. "He must have had this on his mind all the while we were spitting about San Francisco; —and I thought he was annoyed!"

"Position here if you want it come soon," the message read.

"'Position'? Does that mean anything official?"

"Oh, no; — plain job," said Tom. "'If you want it, come soon,' or, 'Position here if you want it. Come soon!'" There are two ways of reading it, don't you think?"

"Quite so. The last sounds more imperative. That is what you meant, is n't it?"

"It is like my father to say, 'If you want it, come soon'; it is more like mother to say, 'Come soon!'"

Neither spoke again for some seconds while they studied the paper together.

"Could there be any reason that you do not know of for saying, 'Come soon'? — any other reason than 'plain job'?" — Mary was smiling at him, but with effort. The wind doubled up the paper between them and she spread it down and kept a finger on it.

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"Yes, two reasons," Tom answered. "Allen says our papers at home have been faking up dispatches on a hectic key : that would worry mother."

The second reason, Mary noticed, he withheld. It rested on one sentence in his mother's last letter to which he would have attached more importance had he not perceived by its general tone that the letter had been written under high nerve-pressure. The words referred to his father's health.

"Don't you want to spare me a little advice? Where would you put the period in that dispatch, if you were in my place?"

"But I know so very little what I should be talking about — not knowing your place," said Mary. "Our places, I fancy, are very different."

"That's an evasion, not an answer. You see, I want this journey to go on just as it began — and here comes this message which may be meant to stop me — and yet it may not. I want my own way so much, honestly, I'm afraid to decide."

"If *you* are afraid, what should I be!" He waited persistently. — "Would it make so much difference in time — you are n't going to stop anywhere?"

"No; but it would mean two months' delay. My impression is they don't wish to urge me, either way."

"Still, there might be those reasons — why you should lose no time?" Again a pause: Mary drew up her neck-piece of monkey-fur; he noticed the whiteness of her cheek against it, and the glistening edges of her hair where it was swept up into a bronze

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knot under her hat-brim. "If you went back the shortest way, how would you go? There is hardly ever a boat now, to anywhere you want to go quickly."

"The first little hooker to Nagasaki, and the first Pacific Mail — anything to San Francisco."

"Don't you want to start at once — does n't it 'call' you?"

"My people call me," he answered. "Other things call the other way."

"Those other things can wait, can't they?"

"Nothing waits; or if it does, it is n't the same."

"I am sure the real things are always worth waiting for and they do not change; but we may change —"

"I don't see but it comes to the same thing," said Tom.

"So; you think you may not come back?"

"Well, you see, it's time I settled to something, here or there."

"It does n't look as if anything could be settled here very soon: 'plain job' may mean more than it sounds."

"It is n't the job," said Tom. Again she had an intuition of something held back which depressed him and vaguely shadowed their counsels. "From what you say, and don't say, I infer you think I ought to go — do you, Mary?"

He gave her name its full value, in his altered tones. She gasped and steadied her voice to answer. Something seemed to blind her, but she took the

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pencil from him and placed her periods firmly :—  
“ ‘ *Come soon,* ’ ” she underscored.

He straightened up slowly and took his elbows from the ivy, and looked off where the road runs into the cold, gray north.

“ I don't know ;—indeed, I don't know,” he heard her relenting murmur.

“ Will you let me write to you ? ”

“ Yes, if you don't promise to write.”

“ I wish you would promise to answer.”

“ Had n't we better leave something to the way we may happen to feel ? I have lived long enough in the East to be a fatalist in some things.” As if to give point to the statement, lo, footsteps were upon them : Mary's mother and her hostess in street attire, followed by the house-boy with more tea.

## CHAPTER VIII

MR. BRUCE and Mary were playing mild billiards in a room off the court, chiefly screens : a stout gentleman in white and a slim, bright-headed girl in sal-low pink ; the Orient knows a pink which red-haired girls can wear. A white camellia in the bosom of her dress threatened to fall as she poised her cue.

Upstairs, Mrs. Bruce and Mrs. Gladwyn had the drawing-room to themselves.

"I want to ask you an intimate question," said the former. She had some knitting in her hands and laid it down. "Are Mary's affections engaged at the present time, do you know?"

Mrs. Gladwyn laughed aloud without pretending to answer.

"Do you find my question too intimate?" asked Mrs. Bruce imperturbably.

"Not for you and me, but I should hardly expect to be as intimate as that with Mary."

"I see you are not prepared to say 'no,' " her friend persisted. "That is precisely my own conclusion."

"What in the world do you mean, my dear Elinor? Have you concluded she is in love with that young engineer?"

"The question may be, what will Mary conclude. To me it looked as if matters had reached a very pretty crisis this evening in the garden."



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"Well, my dear, what would you propose to have me do about it?"

"Tell me, seriously, woman, — what do you think? If I am a reader of situations, I should say we interrupted a declaration in the garden."

"If we did," Mrs. Gladwyn rejoined, "it will probably come on again — unless it was an accident; in that case our interruption may have been very well timed."

"That is more philosophy than should be required of a mother — the mother of a Mary who is going to be a nurse. I don't think at all well of that plan, Susan Gladwyn. Mary should marry. You know how youth goes when they take up that life: ten years will age our Mary sadly."

"Mary does not look upon the life as you do; she feels, on the other hand, quite selfish, preparing to nurse people as a 'gainful occupation.' The poor child wants to pay her debts. She is scorched very deep with that iron."

Mrs. Bruce smiled understandingly and patted her friend's hand. She sat awhile, making tracings with an ivory needle on her satin-flowered lap.

"I have something to tell you, Susan. It will embarrass us both a little, but we should be able to bear it for Mary's sake. I want her to know there is no such pressure about this 'living.' Her name stands in my will for something like two hundred pounds a year."

"Elinor Bruce, what made you!"

"Come; you need n't blush so: it's no great sum."

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But to know it is there might save this hunted feeling; and I don't think you ought to be separated, unless by something more in keeping with a woman's personal destiny than spending her life in sick-rooms. — Now, of course you will say, Mary can't spend her life waiting for dead people's shoes either. I'm not afraid that you'd wish to hurry me off the scene — in fact, I have a better plan than dying. Do let me fund this little sum in her name — now, while it might substantially influence her whole future! Young men just starting in a profession can't ask penniless girls to marry them; a modest boy, as this one seems, would not ask a girl to take his promise and wait for him indefinite years. What little I am giving her I should never miss, and it might mean thrice as much to her now as twenty years from now; — I am liable to move on very slowly."

"You should not have done this, Elinor: we are such a very side-issue — I can't see what we should be doing in your will."

"I think you must allow me to make my own will. Mary is only a very small-sized legatee. My money is not family money either; I do not blush to say, it was made in trade. You may remember an old joke in 'Punch' of our beloved Du Maurier's: A lady (whom I trust I do not too much resemble) explains to Mr. Grigsby that her husband, although in business, is in the coffee business, and 'they are all gentlemen in the coffee business.' My coffee money did not come by the road of the generations and I am not bound to pass it on that way. I was not granted

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children — I may pluck a flower from any generation I choose. Mary is my flower. Now, let me please myself, you proud woman. Give up this wild Hong-kong scheme and go back to California, both of you, and rest in your Golden Gates, and let this nursing wait."

"— Till we see what may happen on the boat going home! You, of course, have decided that Mr. Scarth shall go with us? — I can imagine you going still further, Elinor."

"Quite so," her friend replied calmly. "I certainly should not fail to have the young man undeceived as to Mary's circumstances, in the proper manner, by the right person, naturally."

"I wonder what you mean by 'naturally'? You are a very dangerous good fairy: — keep away from the cradle of my daughter's affections. I don't believe they are born — still less named. If they are, it is Mary's own private christening. You and I have not been asked. But when it is I speaking to you, about what you have done for my child — can you doubt what I must feel? — If we have not witched it out of you somehow?"

"Mary has, but you have no spells for me — except once: — now I shall tease you, my doctor-lady! you know that was black magic!"

"It was your constitution; — and you paid your doctor-lady, so don't thrust a case of natural recovery into our otherwise uncorrupted friendship."

"— While you thrust everything back on me! Won't you even let Mary know that she need not

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waste the flower of her youth providing for old age?"

"It is not mine to say what shall or shall not be told — and yet, last wills and testaments of those we love are sacred things. Mary would shrink from peeping into yours for the sake of seeing her own name there."

"Life is a sacred thing, and the hopes of youth, and happiness. . . . So," said the cheated benefactor, "I have paraded in my grave-clothes for nothing. I shall hang on forever and see my flower fade — all because of a ruthless mother. Well, you two have less common sense in proportion to your alleged brains than any Americans I ever have heard of."

"And why Americans?"

"I speak of the only type of American I consider genuine —"

"Because repulsive? Oh, narrow, narrow!"

Mary at that moment rejoined them, strolling into the room. The older women were drawn up in front of a miserly fire in an English grate. Mary took the fender-stool and leaned against her mother's knee. Mrs. Bruce plucked one of the numerous scarfs she had a way of leaving on the backs of chairs, and cast it in a wad at Mary, who shook out its spangled length and wound herself in it.

"How adorable young arms are through that Egyptian gauze," sighed Mrs. Bruce with fond eyes fixed on Mary mournfully. "And to think of consigning her for life to starched uniforms!"

"How paltry we are, dear Lady Brucey," Mary

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smiled back at her. "What were you and mamma so heated about when I came in just now?"

"As usual, your countrywomen."

"The kind who shake your insular prejudices?"

"The kind who explain them. — I am very sure I could manage better with the true type who jump at all they can get without any bones about it."

"Have you seen any Americans around here lately who don't?" asked Mary suspiciously. The answer was a double laugh and a glance from Mrs. Gladwyn at her friend, who waived the warning cheerfully.

"Mary, I hope you are not as proud as your mother, my dear."

"My mother proud?" said Mary. "Mamma is not proud; she admits it. That part of her, she claims, was crucified in a good cause, years ago."

"Give me some proof — any proof that your mother is not the most obstinately proud woman who ever sacrificed a child to that vanity of vanities in mothers."

"I take you up on that, Lady Brucey," Mary said, while the others laughed with an air of mutual understanding. She squared around on her stool and exhibited her parent with a fine wave of her arm. "There she is, ma'am; the whole world could tread on her. I dare mamma this moment to prove she has a particle of pride about her! If she had, she'd ask Lady Brucey for the loan of thirty guineas."

"Mary!" screamed Mrs. Gladwyn.

"Mamma, Mr. Scarth does not go with us to Hong-



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kong. He starts for home to-morrow. Shall he go—? You know what I mean!”

“Mary means,” said Mrs. Gladwyn, throwing away everything in defence of Mary’s sanity at the moment, “that we have not discharged a debt we owe him, on an arrangement proposed by me. It’s an awkward fact which I think we might have kept to ourselves.”

“It may not interest dear Lady Brucey, but I think it ought to begin to interest us.”

“I told you I should attend to it.”

“Well, dear; have you the money by you? He goes to-morrow.”

“The money will be sent him before the summer is over.”

“Does n’t it occur to you he may want it now?” Mary sighed desperately — “Mrs. Bruce, she is n’t proud, or she would n’t keep a young man out of his money who can’t ask it of women and — missionaries! There; I’ve insulted both my parents and now I think I’d better go to bed!”

The women exchanged looks when Mary’s back was turned. She stood listening to some sound from the court. “I have the money by me if you will take it,” Mrs. Bruce whispered.

“I will take anything to stop Mary’s mouth. I told you she was scorched very deep —”

“Don’t you see what this means? — when a girl like Mary loses all her sense of humor and bullies her mother — that’s not pride.”

“You see, perhaps, then, why I don’t propose to

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encourage your practical designs on that poor boy who has n't seen his family in four years!"

"Designs, you blind woman! He is in love with Mary, or all ready to be."

"Then let him take his time; I shan't help him, and you shall not either!"

"Do you consider that you may be spoiling his future, too?"

"What do we know about his future — what does he know himself! He has not seen a white woman except Mary —"

"Mamma, here is your chance," Mary interrupted, coming down the room. "Your absconding creditor is below." Tom's cards were presented as she was speaking.

"Dear me, what a waste of cards! we know quite well whom it is he wishes to see."

"Mamma, you wish to see him!" said the tiresome girl. "I'm not going down, of course."

"— You have got a headache?" Mrs. Bruce asked ironically.

"I have — all that's needful to going straight to bed, if any one should inquire?"

"Is that pride?" Mrs. Bruce nodded as Mary closed the door on her exasperating behavior.

Mrs. Gladwyn had her private altercation with her creditor from which he retired with a hot face and Mrs. Bruce's money, or as much as he would consent to take, in his pocket, but he felt sorely cheated of some other things. A boat had been reported at Chemulpo to leave the following noon: there was no

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more than time next morning to get himself and his stuff on board.

“I have never felt so vexed with Mary in my life,” said Mrs. Bruce.



## PART II





## CHAPTER IX

THE Ludwell house, before the fire, stood near the summit of California Street obstructing about a hundred feet of that most wonderful view. There are many who remember it as one of the kindest, as it was one of the ugliest, of those early nabob mansions which the fire swept away:—peace to its hospitable ashes! All that remained of it when I saw it, two years after the catastrophe, was a cracked and blackened lintel open to the sky and some broken stone steps that buried themselves in dead grass. But the ground and the view are still there, and the Ludwells are not buried in dead grass.

No one who knew Mrs. Ludwell could have predicted her drawing-room unless they knew, as well, her almost fanatical scrupulousness in little ways touching the feelings of her friends. As the Ludwells grew richer, most of their friends grew richer, too: there was no stemming the tide of gifts and giving—to show unfailing appreciation of such a conglomerate stream of tribute, year by year, would have ruined any interior-artist's design. Cousin Tom also became more assured of his own connoisseurship as time went on, and everything he touched seemed turned to Gold. His greatest happiness, aside from the Game, was spending money on the women he loved. They writhed and counterfeited, but his gifts

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were loyally honored in the sight of all ; he noticed, and it hurt him if one were guiltily withdrawn.

But — flowers, always flowers — and sunshine athwart the long carpets, and that noble view of the Bay, as far as three sets of curtains allowed you to see it, and the daughter of the house coming into the room in the heyday loveliness of eighteen with the step of a flying joy — that were enough for most of us ; it was quite enough, apparently, for Mr. Dalby Morton who had come to ride with Clare.

They met swiftly in the middle of the room and executed a high hand-shake and both immediately began to laugh. Clare composed her features quickly and lifted pathetic eyebrows exhibiting one little foot still in a house-slipper.

“So sorry I can’t go. I’ve been trying to get you all the morning. — Sorry you came for nothing.”

“Why can’t you go? Suddenly don’t want to?”

“Oh, no. Things have been happening. It was noon before I got mamma’s message and I tried to call you up, but I suppose you were lunching. She can’t be home till late and one of us must be here when my cousin Tom arrives. His boat gets in to-day, and there is such bad news for him!”

Dalby did not recall the cousin’s name, but paid his respects to the bad news in sobered silence. She left the subject hastily :— “How’s your new horse? Think you are going to like him?”

Dalby said prudently, as one expecting to sell, that he thought so ; it was only in the last five minutes, while waiting for Clare, that he had made up his

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mind to part with the beast, having more than a suspicion of cocked ankles in the future of his fore feet. The horse was not outside : even young persons of fashion at that time were frequently seen in a plebeian street-car on their way out to the riding-club where their mounts awaited them. The talk went back to the family topic, and Clare's eyes grew big with sympathy. She had known Dalby longer than she had the cousins at Roadside and much more intimately ; it was natural she should speak to him of their present trouble.

Cousin Caroline, she said, was staying with them, but spent every moment, of course, with Cousin Henry at the Adler ; and she explained how they had rushed him down, his wife and a local doctor, over terrible country roads, afraid he might not live to get there. He had been taken dangerously ill in some wretched little mining-town up in the foothills, far from the skilled help he required at once. And the doctors would operate early to-morrow morning. This was the ambush of fate prepared for Tom.

"He can't have heard anything, you think?"

"Impossible!" said Clare ; "he's been traveling a month. You know this is the cousin who went to Korea.

He's quite a bit older than you, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes. I was a 'flapper' when he went away. He sent me wonderful post-stamps for my collection—he has kept on sending ; I suppose he thinks I'm a 'flapper' still. But you must remember him?"

Dalby remembered him, coolly. "Did n't we all go

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to some show together once? He took in all stage-machinery business as if it was his trade."

"That's Tom! He always wanted to know how everything 'worked' and he generally found out. He mended my doll's eyes once — took off her hair to do it and I cried and almost fought him. He just went ahead and said nothing, but it came out all right."

The talk continued to jump from one thing to another: the waste of Dalby's afternoon sitting there, with a new horse waiting and the tide just right for the sands; the pity it was to take these things too hard (Dalby's turn), since people came through them every day. Who were they going to have? Clare named the surgeon, and Dalby nodded: then it was a sure thing. And how about the dinner to-night? — to a cluster of sub-débutantes, followed by a box-party at the first appearance of a great Diva on that coast.

Clare owned with proper reluctance that a dinner engagement must hold. Cousin Caroline and Tom would be at the Adler as late as possible, this last night: it could make no difference to them! Her charming eyes, arched like a cherub's, shone with tears; she looked very hard at Dalby and could scarcely see him. He saw her and he never had liked her so well; he wanted to kiss her on the spot. She seemed to him suddenly a woman.

Dalby was light, but he appreciated depth in others, and he had a very kind heart for sorrow as well as a respect for it, never having had any that he



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fully recognized of his own. Everybody but her husband and son knew that Mrs. Morton's life was a tragedy.

The butler, having answered the door, entered with a florist's box and submitted the address on it to his young mistress. "I think there is some mistake, miss: I told the boy to wait."

"How stupid," said Clare. "This should have gone to the Adler. Anything with a Ludwell on it always comes straight here."

She chose a pen from an ornate little desk that stood open at her elbow, underscored the "Scarth" after "Henry Ludwell," and crossed out the house-address. "Do you spell it sanatorium or sanatorium?"

Dalby said either would do for his part, and James, begging pardon, murmured, "I think, miss, the Adler spells it with an *a*."

"Well, I've just written an *o*," said Clare cheerily, "but I guess it will get there this time."

So that was disposed of, and Mr. Dalby Morton said he must be going, and Clare did nothing to hinder him — rather wishing he would: it was time for her father any minute with poor Tom. How stupidly Dalby spoke of him; he had n't seen the point at all. It did not reflect upon Dalby in her eyes that Tom had seemed to him just a common mechanical sort of chap; rather she fell to wondering about Tom. How would he look after four years in darkest Korea — what would his manners be? They were good and clever, the cousins at Roadside; still, they were a little

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odd ; you could n't combine them with your other friends. There was always that just too much of individuality in speech and dress which marked them in society.

Dalby ran down the steps and gravely raised his hat to Clare in the window. She was yet such a child that all forms of grown-up homage from young men thrilled her ; and Dalby's nice upward look was a trifle more than conventional. She watched his well-tailored back as he swung lightly aboard his car.

San Francisco is still young enough to rejoice in turning out such boys as Dalby Morton. They do nothing in particular, but they do it in good form ; and their fathers in many cases did more than was necessary. They were the men of force, but they were not the men of refinement. Dalby's father told coarse stories, and was not over-careful of his neighbor's landmarks. At Dalby's age he had half-built and wholly financed a main line and feeders, — Webster's "substantive and six," — fighting his right of way by hook or by crook, begging subsidies, and laying hands on all the collateral mines and lands and industries he could suck into his powerful grasp. Dalby had a sporting sense of honor : he would not, for instance, have sold his new horse with the future cocked ankles to Mr. Ludwell for Clare, not though Mr. Ludwell's head-groom should close one eye to the transaction ; but he did propose to work him off on any friend with eyes of his own who took the risk of believing them.

Clare walked to the mantel-mirror and smiled at

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herself dreamily ; then she looked at herself sober, as Dalby had last seen her ; — the reflection was still more fair. The carriage drove up and stopped ; no one was getting out. The coachman left a message from her father to say that he had an appointment downtown, and that her cousin had gone straight from the steamer dock to the hospital. So everybody's afternoon was disposed of and she had sacrificed her own, — this divine day, perfect for the beach-course or the downs.

She gave orders where the carriage was to meet her mother, and, catching her breath with a little laugh, she ran to the telephone and called up the riding-club. She had experienced another quick turn, and now she saw only Dalby's grave, upraised look, and a vision of the sands in evening light, and two young figures on horseback racing above the long lines of surf, and the dark, fresh, glittering ocean rolling out to where the Farralones crown themselves with sunset.

They might have missed each other — they did not, and one charmed hour was saved out of a whole wasted day. Coming home, Clare motioned her companion to stop their car at the corner of Van Ness Avenue.

“ We will walk down past the Adler ; I want to inquire about Cousin Henry.”

She waited on one of the seats amidst flowering shrubs, as you enter through a little court, now in deepshade. It seemed a long colloquy between Dalby and some one to whom he spoke just inside the vestibule. He came down the steps soberly, and would

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not meet her eyes; she fancied even he looked pale. He stood by her without speaking while some noise in the street went by — a heavy express wagon piled with trunks on its way uptown from the ferry. Stillness settled on them again; they heard the distant clangor of a cable-car bearing down upon the avenue from a cross-street. Lights began to prick through the gathering fog in the lower city, and doleful sirens answered one another out on the vanished Bay.

“What do they say? Is he any worse?”

“They sent a messenger for your cousin — to lose no time. There had been a change: it was decided to operate at once. That was three hours ago.”

“While we were riding,” Clare murmured in an awed tone.

“It has n’t gone well, I’m afraid. In fact — they say — he is sinking.”

“You don’t mean — he is dying!” Clare sprang up — “Cousin Henry, in there now?” She saw the truth in Dalby’s eyes. “Is mamma there? Oh, some one ought to be with Cousin Caroline!”

Dalby reminded her that Mrs. Scarth had her son with her, although he had not been in time to be recognized by his father, who was under the ether when he arrived.

How unthinkable this reality seemed after one’s foolish dreams. She was to wear a new dress that night — almost full evening dress. Tom, of course, still thought of her as a child; she was to have burst upon him in her completed loveliness — she knew just how she would look in that dress. Then off we go

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to our other life that claims us with music and lights and laughter and flowers from young men, whose suffrages were not so much worth in themselves, but were highly necessary to a forthcoming bud's success; — and our hearts at home with the mothers sitting up together listening to their young traveler's tales. A few words with Tom by himself, then kind good-nights and Cousin Henry's name in our prayers and his life saved in the morning. He would get well: every one did who had Dr. Symington; and she and Tom would celebrate his convalescence with some nice cousinly times of their own. Tom, she had decided, must be her first lover: he was not eligible, but he was not contemptible; and she needed a runner-up to make Dalby Morton ask himself how he stood. Dalby had "rushed" girl after girl: he should not exhibit her as one of his favorites of a season.

But Clare's worldly precocity was very much on the surface; she had a warm heart, and it sank in self-disgust at the awful sobriety of the truth in contrast to this silly tissue of vanities woven about one's own image as we long to impress others.

Dalby was respectfully puzzled by her wretchedness. Had she cared for these cousins so much more than he had allowed for? — as far as he could remember they had had but the slightest part in her life. What he did recognize, and it raised her in his eyes, was her quick and self-forgetful sympathy. It touched him with a new and sweeter vision of the girl's real nature, of which he had seen only the lightness and hardness and excitability of youth.



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She scarcely spoke on the way home, except to thank him, as they parted, for some little attention to her cousin — asking if he could do anything for him while he remained in the city.

Tea was brought and she drank hers fast, not waiting for her mother, who came in, flushed and anxious, from a conversation at the telephone. She quite upbraided Clare for being so late.

“Late, mamma! Must I go to that dinner now?”

Mrs. Ludwell answered impatiently; she had not followed the girl’s spiritual reactions, and her sudden absorption in this vicarious grief struck her as disproportionate and uncalled for. Extremes were what she had always combated in Clare.

With another outburst came the cry: “Mamma, think of Engracia! — not to even know! What is she doing now, I wonder? — laughing and talking, perhaps.” Mrs. Ludwell rose with lips shut hard and left the room. But Clare wept while her hair was being done because the maid could not refrain from speaking of what her mistress had purposely withheld — the last message from the Adler. When the dress had gone over her head and the carriage was waiting below, her mother came in quietly and kissed her.

“It is all over, dear. They will be here now in a few minutes: — I don’t think you need see them to-night.” Her sweet brows were raised in pain, but behind them the mind of a practiced hostess worked clear. Another carriage drove up; a soft bustle followed the shutting of the hall door but no voices. With a low order to one of the maids, she went down

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to meet her guests. Clare did not go back into her room and hide her inappropriate splendor; she remained outside listening, with chills running over her. They came straight upstairs, Cousin Caroline's small, bowed figure with her mother's arm around her; no one spoke, but Clare flew to meet them, took the tearless woman in her arms and pressed her cool lips to the hot, thin, stricken face that buried itself on her young breast in silence. But after the bedroom door closed upon the two wives, low sounds were heard, unknown in that house since Clare's own childish griefs monopolized its woes.

The butler passed her with Tom's bags and turned a corner of the hall. Tom was just behind, walking as if he had forgotten his way around the house. She stepped in front of him in her startling festal whiteness and held out both hands, calling him by name. He hardly seemed to know her. Grief was a new experience to him, too; the texture of his mind gave way slowly to the force of this first great blow. He had been four years among strangers under the influence of outside impressions, unused to appeals, to little words and looks of sympathy such as Clare gave him, appearing like a bright angel in the hall. She repeated his name softly, with exquisite pity.

"Tom, dear Tom! Don't you know me? This is Clare." Breaking through the unnatural chill between them, she lifted her wonderful little face impulsively to his. A silence followed his kiss. "That way," she pointed. "Good-night." He did not stir. "I am going to an awful little dinner to-night. Kiss your dear

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mother for me. I *have* to go!" He kissed her instead with, this time, more consciousness of what he was doing.

"She felt exactly the same sober difference in their ages as she remembered him. He seemed to her older even than Dalby Morton, though with none of Dalby's gay sophistication of manner. His eyes were not cold, but they had the ingenuous, innocuous abstraction of a boy's. She had dramatized his grief, but she could not dramatize him. He was just Tom—the same as if he had never been away.

## CHAPTER X

ENGRACIA could not be at her father's funeral, though Cousin Tom lavished money and used all his railroad influence to get her across the continent in time. To have waited, as Caroline was urged, would only have prolonged the infliction of their private grief upon the generous Ludwell household. Had it been "just Anna," the case, Caroline felt, might have been different. But between her husband living and his cousin there had been a mental and temperamental antagonism — forgotten on her host's side now in a great rush of kindness: still, for her, there was the irony of that silence of the guest upstairs, recking nothing of the profound stir his last answer had made — the answer to all criticism, the end of all argument — that impenetrable peace.

"Others abide our question. Thou art free.

We ask and ask: Thou smilest and art still —"

A telegram reached Engracia at Colfax, checking her through journey, and Tom met her at Marysville. They had a long, sweet drive home, resting in the mere happiness of being together again, speaking of everything but the dread fact awaiting them in a common shyness of expression. But now the women were shut up alone in the summer heat at Roadside, and the mother's retrospect began — the

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long, broken recital of what had been done or could not be done, the mistakes, the infinite despair of all those "too lates," when the last "too late" is said.

Engracia would have spared her mother these spasms of wrenched, tearless talk, but that it must come she knew; only speech at last to the one sufficient listener could soften those hard knots of grief. She was not old enough, or she was not so made that she could share the restlessness that followed, but she was forced to witness it in her mother, who paced the house, rearranging rooms, emptying bureau drawers, putting out of sight old things grown terrible; or repenting and saying wildly, "These should be used; they can do good to somebody!" She wrote impossible letters to the friends at home who wondered how she could write. When implored to let the letters and the closets wait, she asked, "Wait for what? You don't suppose it will ever be any easier? I am dead now—after a while everything will hurt."

Death is such a strong revolt from nature, so scornful of what we may mean by our preparedness—no wonder, if it be our fate to meet it first in middle-life, full of material cares, unable physically to break down, that it should breed irregular excitements and distortions of the nerves that estrange us to the knowledge of those who love us best. It is not uncommon to criticize the way our friends "take" their grief—grief is a thing we have to learn to take, and different temperaments show suffering in different ways. Engracia had matured early in wis-



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dom of the affections or she could not have understood her mother at this time.

At length came the reaction: they could read — they drugged themselves with books. New books were not so common in that house, but old ones are best; beloved poems they thought they had known took new and piercing meanings. Caroline plunged into all the metaphysical speculations overhauling our ancient certainties, and through such brain-sick followings one line from some pure lyric matchless in its beauty would sob through her heart, or a grand sentence from the Bible more convincing than all the arguments “about it and about —”

And Bran — but how shall we speak of Bran? Who is there has escaped the sight of a dog taking his share in human grief with only his dog-soul to help him? Bran could almost speak, but he could not understand — and he could remember. He traversed the house from room to room; he lay outside a certain door for hours; he listened while he slept — but on that couch where he was wont to climb and crowd into the space allotted him by one he missed, he was never seen again. He would stand there and quiver with his nose and whimper to himself and go patting softly away, and often, as if brain-weary with the question, he would drop down sighing and go suddenly to sleep. Neither could Bran believe there is such a thing as Death. But his world was not ended while he had the young boss and the women, who were but women, — still, one loved them in their place.

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Tom was out in the heat all day learning his father's job. He thought more of it now that he had taken it on his own shoulders. At noon he came in and hurried through a large lunch in silence; he joined them at dinner, fresh-shaven, thin, tall, in spotless black and white,—he was as neat as a soldier in his dress;—this about comprised their knowledge of him after four years. To the intensity and passion of their grief he seemed a stranger. But what would love be worth if they could not understand this as well? They were not experienced readers of mankind, but their own type of men they knew, and loved them rather more that allowance must be made for their inherent lack of expression.

They, poor things, were come to the woman's eternal question of clothes. Yet almost all which that dread just now implied had been spared them by Cousin Anna's beautiful thoughtfulness and exhaustive care. Boxes arrived containing their new mourning, entirely chosen and purchased by her. Granting that we still do "go into mourning," that reason has nothing to offer at such times, and we crave ashes, veils, or any equivalent that custom dictates, on our heads—what is there one woman can do for another in the woman's world of tragic futilities to match the relief of this? Anna had done justice to her friend's good-breeding while she remembered her circumstances;—not for twice the money and ten times the effort could Caroline have approached such results. And withal a letter explaining certain retrenchments and omissions which only Cousin

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Anna's scrupulousness could have deemed necessary.

"I have tried to remember your great heat up there, my dears. Do wear anything white you have, no matter how it is made. Let your loneliness be at least a protection and dress as you please. So you see I have sent only two gowns apiece and very few sets of bands. Engracia will find it an occupation to hemstitch them herself." — A gentle hint: Cousin Anna had remarked and privately disapproved of Engracia's absorption in books to the exclusion of her needle; there were girls she knew with fathers worth many thousands who saved themselves yearly, doing fine sewing, more than would suffice to dress a daughter of "the indigent poor." — "Gloves can be ordered as you want them; you won't want them unless you come to the city. Engracia's hat is my gift. It is one of the newest shapes and the trimming can be changed when she leaves off a veil and it will still make her a useful hat.

"As to Clare's visit, I hardly know what to say. Her father thinks you can't really want her; still, it is best at these times, we are told, to be taken out of ourselves as much as possible. It is such happiness to me to do things for those I love, and I feel so sure it is the same with you, dear Caroline, that I shall give you, regardless of your feelings in other ways, an opportunity to help me out in one of my mother problems. If you could have Clare for a little visit, much as you may dread it just now, it will certainly make the summer easier for me. I think it was her

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own proposal at first; now the impulse has yielded a little to other things, but a letter from Engracia, fixing a time, — with an assurance from you that it is all right, — would bring it to pass. I am sure her feeling in the matter was very genuine; and she wants to become acquainted with Engracia.

“I know how little you can desire any change, any mental movement or effort — you are so hurt all through! — but we must not give way to this apathy. It certainly will not do for Engracia, and I know how little you mind for yourself, if it were best for her. For my own girl this summer, speaking selfishly, I desire two things in both of which you can help me. A few weeks of country quiet with such occupations as she would have with you, and in some place where she does not meet *all* the time the same young set she will go out with next winter. I don’t disapprove of them, — not all of them, — but she will see quite enough of them as it is. Meanwhile I want something different, a brief disconnection of ideas.”

“That means, I suppose, some young man Clare is seeing too much of,” Caroline speculated.

“It means Dalby Morton,” said Engracia.

“Is n’t he rather old for Clare?”

“Dalby Morton? He’ll never be old; he has n’t half her brains at any age.”

“Well; a letter like that makes it easy to do anything. You will write to Clare at once?”

“Of course, mother; but what will the poor child do up here? She can’t read and practice all day long.”

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"She can disconnect her ideas."

"She can exercise Nipper. Tom must get him up and have him shod."

"But are you never going to ride again? You are always too pale—"

"If there were only some other roads—"

"Ah," groaned Caroline — "but can't you go sometimes with Tom?"

"That is worse, mother dear. Not one man but every man he meets, if he has nothing else to say, will stop him and ask questions — and eye him steadily with that cold curiosity —"

"No; they mean it as a tribute; they all loved him."

"Well — Tom can bear it, alone."

"He bears everything; he does it by hardening himself deliberately, as you ride down your saddle-galls. And all his work is haunted the same way. I shudder to see him at that desk evenings, going over the papers; and the letters come — addressed the same. — I wonder if it will ever stop?"

"Don't let's try too hard to be reasonable; it's not to be expected. People like us must be allowed to go out of our minds harmlessly for a while."

"Well; the summer can't last forever; then we shall have to begin to think."

They could fill in each other's breaks: this thinking which loomed ahead had reference to an event of fundamental consequence to the future of the Torres Tract as well as their own family fortunes.



## CHAPTER XI

ON the day of Henry Scarth's funeral in San Francisco, on the other ocean-side, a four-year-old boy ran out of his home gates with his hand in the collar of a big dog. The collie rushed across the road ; the child would not let go. A touring-car taking Mr. Schuyler Rivington to his train—he was driving himself that morning—swung round one of those sharp curves hid in shrubbery which are a peculiar menace of the North Shore roads. When he saw the child, it was too late to do anything but ditch his car. The little boy was dragged home screaming by a frightened nurse : but two other little boys, at school in Switzerland, in that moment became fatherless ; their mother, a widow, at thirty-one ; a chair stood empty at a dozen directorial tables in New York and Boston ; and the Torres Tract — so little known to persons implicated in these other facts — had lost its president. Had Henry Scarth lived a few days longer he would have known that he had lost his own best friend, whose confidence while it lasted (it had never been broken) secured his position and supported his policy in the plans they had made and fostered together. The preponderance of stock in Rivington's name passed into a trusteeship pending the settlement of his estate.

Soon after the official announcement reached Road-



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side, Tom, on business in the city, learned from Cousin Tom these particulars, which filled the Eastern papers, but had not been given much space on the Coast. He heard also for the first time, intimately as it concerned them at home, the name of Mr. Rivington's financial representative who held the future of the Tract in his hands.

"When Cornish comes out to report on you, there will be no sentiment about it : he is a very strict business man."

"Mr. Rivington, I always supposed, was a good business man?" Tom suggested.

"He was, and he was not — of late years ; the papers called him a millionaire philanthropist. Most of his shrewd investments were made earlier. Cornish carried out for him latterly a good many policies he did not himself agree with : that I am pretty sure of. Reclamation with private capital was one of them. Rivington believed in it as a benefit to humanity. What he and your father expected to do on the Torres Tract, he knew would never pay in his lifetime — Cornish, of course, can't act for the widow and heirs on any idealistic theory like that. He can't be a philanthropist with trust moneys. I would advise you to be looking around for something else, Tom. They may want you to stay in your father's place, but they won't give you his salary ; — it was hardly a living salary, I'm afraid. These capital operations draw blood. If your load is bigger than you can carry, my boy, I hope you'll come to me."

"Thanks, very much," said Tom ; his breath had

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checked for an instant. "But I'd awfully hate to borrow of a relative."

"Why?"

"— On a basis of sentiment."

"Well, my boy; have you any other basis?"

"I don't happen to need to borrow, thanks again. In fact, an uncle of mother's she used to live with sent her a check as soon as they heard the news. *They* don't forget ever — neither do others who are nearer." Tom smiled gamely in his cousin's face. "It's good to have 'folks' even if you don't borrow of them. I have my savings, too, from Korea."

"Good Lord! what did you save on?"

"They raised me twice, you know — and at Wiju I was rich!"

Cousin Tom laughed at this wealthy youngster; but he liked him well, on various showings, as their elders measure boys. "I believe you will be the money-maker of your family, Tom." Tom did not look so highly complimented — "You certainly don't squander. You'll have the stuff to lend, yourself, some day."

"Then I hope I shall remember one or two things — like to-day — and profit by it."

"You know, Tom, there are engineers — good ones — who make their pile and get up a reputation, too?"

"I believe there are some who have a reputation for advertising," said Tom.

"That's another matter — but why not let one's self be known?"

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"There are, of course, business men in every profession," said Tom.

("That's his father all over again," thought the elder.) "You are not a trader?" — he brought out the touch of hauteur in Tom's words.

"I'm afraid not, sir. I'd hate to economize, for instance, if it hurt the work; and I'm not very keen on deals — contracts."

"I will remember your limitations" — Cousin Tom smiled — "in case anything should turn up. Only, if you choose a line, you must stick to it, you know, and not butt into the game you don't understand. Where are you staying?"

Tom mentioned his hotel.

"Send up your grip to us — like to have you very much."

"Thanks, sir; I'd like to come — I don't believe I will though." Tom's face showed increasing warmth.

"What's the trouble now? Don't want to make a convenience of your friends?"

"Not that altogether," said Tom quite truthfully. He did not argue the question in metaphors but he had read of the siren's isle; perhaps he thought he heard singing that sounded like the voice of his cousin Clare.

## CHAPTER XII

THOSE listless women, meanwhile, ignorantly praying the summer were past, made their effort for sweet Cousin Anna's sake and were rewarded one day by the sight of Clare breaking out of that grimy chrysalis, the Marysville stage, like a delicate yellow butterfly. She was covered by a tussah silk ulster, and a Liberty scarf tied in an inspirational knot (price of that inspiration, twenty dollars) relieved the severity of her traveling-hat. There is refreshment in new styles and new touches of style — they excite amusement if not pleasure; but anything Clare put on became a pleasure in its relation to herself, and Cousin Anna was an expert in choosing what is most recondite in every fashion.

Her gay cordiality melted into tenderness as she gave Cousin Caroline a vigorous girlish hug. Of Engracia she was a trifle more wary. How had she taken this experience? Her face gave no sign. Its smoothness of outline had gained in spirituality as in subtlety by an almost mediæval thinness. Clare liked her no less, however, for not being able to see that rare "type," better than beauty, which her mother had spoken of. Cousin Anna was not a student of types, but she had watched a good many children's faces as they developed, and she had a delicate sense of harmony in expression. Engracia

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thought Clare the sweetest thing she had ever seen and the prettiest.

"We improve, we kids, as we get older, don't we, mamsy?" she hinted later. "I am taking back things very fast."

"What things?" her mother asked idly.

"No matter; I take them back, and I take off my hat to Clare. She's a downright dear."

"I told you so."

"And I did n't believe you — I thought I knew her, but I did n't, it seems."

"Well," said her mother, as if the matter might not be quite settled after all.

Clare was perfectly sure she had come for Engracia's sake, just to keep her company. If not altogether true, she was prepared to make it true, but circumstances were against this well-bred resolution. There was only one Nipper for both girls, and Engracia stayed at home by preference — to be with her mother, she said.

It was amusing at first, those rides all over the work with Tom. She had never been so frankly taken as a matter of course by any young man since she grew up; there were no apologies when he kept her waiting in the sun at farmyard gates while he went inside and waded his horse through pig-litter and cow-litter to have speech with the rancher coming slowly forth in shirt-sleeves accompanied by dogs and fowls and children; and after, he appeared to be thinking what the man had said as they rode along; or if he did talk, there was no return in his words or manner of that



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fascinating shy hint of unspoken passion that had been the under-note of their intercourse, and made him interesting in those tragic days in the city. He had lost that fixed paleness of shock, under his strong coat of sea-tan that so became him then : he was more red than brown. His face perspired ; sometimes he wore hats that were carelessly unbecoming. In the evening he looked well — he was restored in one way, but his manner was no more seductive than in broad day, and never helpless. Instead of sitting out in the moonlight on the steps or strolling by her side down the queer, silent little garden, he was chiefly absorbed in endless accounts or letters to go by next day's stage.

She flattered him sometimes by bringing out his foreign tales and that roused him a trifle, but even here she felt his deep reserve. Disappointment with her visit occupied her thoughts even more than the light dreams had done, when it seemed fit that Tom should be her first — rejected — suitor. She gave up the rides and slept late, and did not see him at breakfast. By afternoon she had become infected with the family habit of waiting for Tom — there was nothing else to wait for. He was always late for tea. Engracia, who could dress in twenty minutes, waited to give it to him ; she would see them from her window — Tom stretched on the grass under the apple trees smoking, with Bran across his chest, Engracia sitting Turk-fashion, rocking herself while she talked. They had no end of what seemed perfectly good talk interspersed with restful silences, when Bran would fur-



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tively lick Tom's ear and have smoke blown in his face.

There had come a letter for Clare one day — conspicuous by its envelope of a new shape and color in passing favor with adventurous girlhood. Clare glanced at both with disdain. She was her mother's own daughter in taste. Her singing went badly that afternoon, and she found fault with Engracia at the keyboard. Afterwards the girls argued long and testily over the ethics of a new novel which Engracia had merely read reviews of, and Cousin Caroline requested them to "stop wrangling, silly things, and do some more Schumann."

But of Schumann as of other estimable things, including estimable cousins, there may come satiety, on a midsummer afternoon, when the heat has invaded the house, and at night — when the moon is growing old and a dreamy little garden lies steeped in her light, with no stricken male soul to share it with. Such restlessness was felt (and watched and guarded) in Venice balconies, "when the nights were warm in May," — and paces the corridors of old Spanish-American houses, where youth and sex are still a woman's only power. Clare was not thinking of any particular male soul, but what are summer moons and summer dresses for? It was the game all the girls were playing — what girl but likes to hold her own and come off with her share of the honors?

But was it such good fun, after all? Some of the boys were men; some of the girls began to feel like

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women — and there was her letter! She went upstairs, not to bed, but to read it over again; and again it gave her a little sick pang of fury. It was a very idle sort of letter from a very idle Edna, one of those young persons possibly whom Clare's mother thought her opening bud might easily see too much of. She was a guest at Overleap, Roberta Sands's big house, where she, an orphan heiress, entertained with the sufficiency of her own great-grandmother, an embassy lady in Tyler's administration — or was it Polk's? — a daring, original girl, looked up to with a slight fear by the other girls. She had more background socially than many of them, though it was little in evidence beyond the presence as chaperon of a modest, elderly kinswoman of the type it takes time and selection to produce. Roberta had a certain high sense of fairness, a satiric unconcern about men, a scorn of mere wealth, and a command of language when she chose, that was quite terrific.

"Dalby Morton is here," the letter ran, "distinctly peeved because you are not. Can't say he wears any willows, though. He spends his entire time with his hostess; she makes him her end-man, and between them they keep us in screams! Roberta's clothes are more wonderful than ever. I've made up my mind that she is n't plain. She is fascinatingly ugly — as ugly as some of those old portraits of women we are told were beauties in their day. She dresses, of course, like a winner, she moves and speaks like one, *and* she wins! It's ten to one the great Dalby strikes his colors before this visit is over — though what she'll

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do with him nobody knows. No, my dear ; we kids are not in it with the Lady of Overleap."

Poor little Clare ! she was "out of it" on all sides ; — her city playfellow forgetting her, her nice, ineligious country cousin not working up the part she had honored him with. That night she wrote to her mother setting a date for the visit's close. "They must be getting tired of me here and I am just a little tired — not of them ; they have been lovely to me, but of the heat, which is terrible. Have had a letter from Edna at Overleap — sounds so cool and delicious up there. I don't believe Roberta will ever ask me again if she hears I am home, when I refused because I was going away. Suppose I write and reconsider ? — all the others are there — it's a sub-débutante's party. I could go up for Friday to Monday, anyhow. Marie had better send my white coat to the cleaners."

## CHAPTER XIII

LETTERS to go by mail were left on a certain table by the office door. Adding hers to the heap next morning, Clare saw a name on an envelope in Tom's handwriting which so surprised her that she involuntarily read the address.

She was seated on the veranda steps that evening, and Tom against the opposite post as usual was smoking. Girls did not very generally smoke in 1904 and they had skirts as much as six yards wide at the hem, where they ended in a sort of mermaid sweep — "sheath-skirts" perhaps we mean. Clare was so sheathed as she sat with a huddle of little lacy frills about her silken ankles. — We've forgotten how pretty it all was and how feminine. (The date of this writing was 1913.)

"Excuse my looking at your letters," she said; "I really did n't mean to, but I saw a name I used to know."

"I don't hide my letters," Tom smiled, lifting his chin to blow away smoke.

"You seem to hide your friends. Why in the world, if you knew those Gladwyns in Korea, could n't you have said so?"

"I don't think you ever asked me; and — I did n't know them very well."

"You write letters to girls you don't know very well? I should take that to be your custom!"

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"I wrote a special letter, if you care to know, in a case where almost strangers were very kind to me."

"Do you mind telling me, just for fun, how much you did know them — I suppose it was in Korea — and what you thought of them?"

Tom gave a short laugh: "I should n't speak of them collectively. They are not in the least alike."

"Begin with Mary, then; what do you think of her?"

"Mr. Gladwyn," Tom took his pipe from his mouth to say composedly, "brought his family down to Wiju, when the Cossacks were running about — not that there was any danger."

"Tom, you don't know how to tell a story! There should be danger! *Let* there be danger!"

"Very well. Suppose you tell it."

"Go on. How many white people were there in Wiju?"

"Ourselves — two men — and the ladies, most of the winter."

"Most of the winter, — and you hardly knew them; although you write to them, of course! Really, there must be a method in these mysteries."

"There is very little method in anything when you run up against a war. They came down to Seoul with us in the spring when we were closed out, you know."

"I know! — how should I know? The last thing you would talk about would be two ladies in your care on a journey like that. Any one else would have had an interview in the 'Chronicle.'"



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Tom said nothing.

"Didn't you find it interesting?"

"I did — at the time: other things were waiting for me here."

Clare held out her hand impulsively. He kept it a moment and their eyes met in a long look of kindness.

"Begin, now, and tell" — she settled her elbows in her lap — "and don't skip."

"I saw very little of them on the road — we being only the escort."

"How did they ride — what did they ride?"

"They were carried, as all ladies are, in sedan chairs — and men too —"

"You were carried too?"

"No; we rode things they call horses."

"Go on," said Clare.

"Well, we left them at Seoul — where I got my cable to come home."

"Where do American ladies stay at Seoul?"

"They stayed with some English friends who are living there. It was quite a change — dining at a civilized table."

"So; you stayed there too? This gets better and better. Oh, Tom, you fraud!"

"They naturally took me in for a meal or two. The Gladwyns did n't shake me off like the dust on their feet."

"I quite believe you. And now that my eyes are opened, tell me — did you buy those lovely dresses all by your lonesome? I wondered how you came to know so much about women's shopping."

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"You liked them?"

"Exquisite! Engracia has given me hers; she can't wear it for so long — and her mother has given her hers. Not that she could n't wear white after a while, if she would only think so."

Tom thought it particularly sweet in Clare to accept the dress from Engracia — she that could have had a new dress for every day in the year. It takes generosity to remember that it hurts a little, even between friends, when the giving is all on one side. "Yes, I had some help there," he admitted with a very good grace.

"Mrs. Gladwyn, I suppose?"

"No; Mrs. Gladwyn is a doctor; she does n't bother much about clothes."

"Her friend who lives in Seoul?"

"No: Miss Gladwyn and I took an afternoon to it. She's amazingly clever about those things."

"How do you know whether she is clever about 'those things'? I suspect she is clever about everything, in your eyes. . . . The streets of Seoul! — a parting close at hand — nothing like foreign soil to draw the hearts of Americans together. . . . And why is she in Hongkong?"

"Training for a nurse." Tom, on the whole, rather enjoyed his cross-examination; Clare's interest was complimentary; also it gave him an opportunity privately to investigate himself a little on that subtly remembered past.

"Why does she want to be a nurse?"

"Because," said Tom, staring into his pipe-bowl,

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"her parents are working for the heathen and she has her own living to earn."

Clare dropped her eyes; presently she said in a different voice, "I ought to know that! — I knew her at Miss Hardinge's."

"Yes, she remembered you," said Tom innocently.

He wondered why Clare blushed — she felt her face flame; and the militant honesty that never hid a slip nor shirked a confession goaded her on to say with passionate exaggeration, "I liked her awfully well, and she liked me, but I was such a little beast that when she went away between terms, and I coaxed the reason out of her, I went and told some one else — it was just plain, wretched poverty! The some one else was Roberta Sands, unlucky for me. She gave me a piece of her mind 'with the chill off' and I — I slapped her face! She never could bear me, anyhow. Miss Hardinge got hold of it through another teacher, a snob of a woman who saw the whole thing. 'A fine scene for the daughters of the first families,' she called it; that was her style! But Miss Hardinge was all the 'family' I needed when she took me apart for a short conversation."

Tom looked away and smoked in silence.

"Of course," Clare continued, "Mary might have told me she'd been asked to stay as an honor-pupil, but she did n't. I had to apologize, and she hugged me and said it was her own fault for not keeping her family matters where they belonged. I can see now it was pride made her blurt it out — and they were proud; for I told mamma the whole story and she

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went to Miss Hardinge and wanted to pay Mary's school-bills, for the sake of her father's work, but that was n't accepted either."

And still Tom smoked in silence.

"How does Mary look?"

"Pretty well, I should say, considering; she and her mother are pretty good travelers."

"I don't mean how *is* she; I meant her looks. She used to have wonderful hair she could sit on and a big mouth full of splendid teeth."

"Her teeth seemed to be all there."

"It's perfectly plain what's the matter with you, Tom! Well, I won't tease you."

"You can't tease me — about Miss Gladwyn; but I don't much fancy this style of joking, if you ask me."

"The very saying you are n't teased shows you are. Never mind: it's good for you. You are taken too seriously in your own family, Tom; and you all take jokes — well, of this kind — too awfully to heart. That's my frank opinion, though it may be a fault on the right side. For my part, I don't see how you could help being in love with any girl not an absolute monster, cooped up all winter with her in a place like Wiju — and such a journey! I should think you were made out of wood if you were n't."

"Admit that I might have been, though I did n't know it — I certainly am not in love with her now."

"If you did n't know it then, how can you be sure you are n't now?"

"For the simple reason —" said Tom, his eyes

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changing — “If I tell you why, will you promise not to ask me another question?”

“What about?”

“You know what about!”

“Is that necessary?”

“It’s the condition.”

“I promise,” said Clare softly.

“I am not in love with her — now, because I’m in love with some one else — and this time I do know it.”

Clare broke her promise in the next sentence and Tom got up and walked away.



## CHAPTER XIV

CLARE'S trunk had gone by stage. Tom was to drive her down to Marysville, starting in about an hour. Consuming a whole day was an effort and an honor not bestowed on every guest, and Tom's mother took it in this case for evidence conclusive that he was personally affected by his cousin's departure.

A conversation of extreme and sudden intimacy had sprung up between her and Clare in the sitting-room alone. Its animation marked the relief that is sometimes felt at the close of a visit, in the main successful, yet which has proved to be something of a strain on both sides. Caroline was delighted with Clare, but as a mother she studied her in the light of what mischief she might do.

"What Tom needs is to play with girls more," said Clare, reckless of the tender theme.

"Then play with him," said Tom's mother, dissembling.

"I mean, he needs to be flirted with."

"Then flirt with him." Caroline's effort would not have deceived a child, but Clare saw nothing artificial in her bravado. "Only be careful—" she added.

"Oh, I'm not serious, cousin; though I think, for that matter, Tom could take care of himself: he's a great discourager of flirtation," she laughed to herself.

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"The only flirtation that is fair between you young things is the kind that might be serious if it wanted to. Unless my boy is flirted with on that plan, I hope he'll be left alone."

"I don't see why any girl should n't be serious with Tom, if she felt like it."

"— To the extent of marrying him, for instance?"

"Certainly, if she cared enough."

"Enough for him, or also enough to share his life — of small means in stupid, lonely places?"

"But why should n't he be one of the successful engineers who don't stay in stupid places?"

Caroline laughed at the ingenuous definition. "Because if you are going to change the face of nature you have to go where nature is, if you call nature stupid. And an engineer's success does n't always mean a choice of where to live;—a girl who insisted on that should never flirt with a boy like Tom. She might spoil his work or only just spoil him—for any other girl."

"How tragic we are! All because I said he ought to play with girls."

"Girls can make tragedy for men who are capable of tragedy — which means the power to feel in excess of the power to reason, does n't it?"

"That does n't sound much like Tom," said Clare with a little pout of sarcasm.

"I think it does; but perhaps his mother does n't know him."

"Cousin, I assure you — and I speak for the other girls too — we *like* the men of Tom's kind, only they

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must let themselves go! They must make *us* 'feel beyond our power to reason.'"

"You mean, that a girl brought up in your circumstances could marry a man in Tom's, with a fair chance of happiness?"

"I mean that circumstances would have nothing to do with it."

"I can scarcely believe you; but if it's true, it looks as if we had not lost our American girls—the kind who helped to 'subdue the continent.' They did not have easy lives, but they knew something about the True Romance—that you and Engracia were quarreling about."

"Oh, I understood her little jeer" (an allusion to one of those hot-weather arguments in which each side said more than it meant, and East and West were personified in the light of conventional prejudice). "We girls get tired out here of being called materialistic, and spoiled children. We *do* believe in the real things, if we could ever get at them."

"If they could get at you! Well, we'll forgive each other; and *I* need forgiveness for dragging in my son—only as a type, though. The boys will have to take their lives in their own hands when it comes to you wretched girls in reality. Mothers can't help nor hinder."

"But, cousin,"—Clare blushed beautifully,—"*Tom* will never risk his life on me. You don't know what a glacier he is! I might confess, if it was worth while—"

Engracia entered just then upon what looked to

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that astute observer like a most injudicious exchange of confidences: her mother's blush, repeating Clare's, confirmed her worst suspicions.

It was the first sign of returning mental health with Caroline that she could dream once more of happiness, — her children's, — even though she dreamed preposterously. She grew proud in her folly and sought sympathy of Engracia, who had suspected what was going on in those lonely piazza paces, from which her mother came in to the light with a new expression on her face. She saw her duty in the case and did it without flinching.

“Leaving out Cousin Anna and Cousin Tom, — though I think you would find *him* quite an obstacle, — Clare can have any man she wants if she is firm about it; but she does n't want Tom. Only his mother and sister could imagine such a thing.”

“Who knows!” the obsessed one retorted. “She gave me the impression that Tom could have any girl *he* wanted if he were ‘firm about it,’ and that he had n't, moreover, even tried, in her case.”

“Mother, mother! She was talking to you! She's not refusing Tom to his own mother before he has asked her. — His refusal is ready for him just the same.”

“It would work out beautifully,” Caroline sighed, hugging her folly. “She would light up his life of plain *dig*, and he would give her ‘the stars and the stillness,’ and that single-hearted devotion all her life that's not so common these days, let me tell you.”

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"Yes, if she wanted his single heart, but she does n't. Tom could n't win a girl like Clare, and he may thank his stars and his stillness that he can't. Of course she is terribly pretty."

"I see higher things in her than you do."

"You see her as she is not — now. She is n't ready for the stars and the stillness (forgive me, mamsy), and who blames her for it! Not I! you have got to love a man awfully well before you dare to live Tom's life with him — our life, that you lived —"

"My dear, I don't brag of it. I should call it a much greater 'dare' to venture on a life of arrant luxury with one of those spoiled boys of rich men's sons who have never wanted a thing they did not get!"

"That's the venture Clare will make, however, and it will teach her all she needs to know — and all *he* needs to know, unless it ends in shipwreck for them both."

"Ah, well; in these days it is the children who are wise —"

"But, mammy dear, can't you see what a wild experiment it would be for them both — supposing everything true that is n't true? I don't believe Tom himself would ever dream of it."

"And I believe his heart is hers, in a smothered way, already."

"He had better keep it smothered, then. He may be having a few aches, but he'll get over it. Thank Heaven, he's busy!"

"As I say, it is the young who have all the pru-

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dence nowadays : fathers and mothers are generally mistaken, are n't they ? ”

“ Always, when they try to marry off their children.”



## CHAPTER XV

A FEW more weeks and then came the dreaded executor's visit, and matters of the heart were put by for a more immediate crisis. The women hid their nervousness under a specious levity. Engracia wanted to know where Himself, as she called Mr. Gifford Cornish, in view of his looming largeness in their affairs, could be least unworthily lodged. The guest-room proper at this season had the affliction of an afternoon sun weltering in, but it had its own bathroom; it also had two closets. The bathroom settled it.

"There is one thing you must see to: I know I shall forget," said Mrs. Scarth exhaustedly. "Find the key to that second closet and lock it!—or take your things out."

"Himself can't want two closets—he's not going to stay all winter, let us hope."

Engracia had but one, and since leaving off colors, she had a banished collection of pinks and blues and hats with roses to quarter somewhere. It struck her as the last straw to have to find another place for them in such weather!

Cornish flanked their preparations, after all, by arriving ahead of his telegram,—which was not his fault, country telegrams having that coy way with them; but he came at a desolate hour, too late for

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luncheon and too early for tea. Mrs. Scarth received him, not looking her best — certainly looking much older than he had expected. All the Scarths had stood still as to ages in his mind since it first came in his way to know about them personally.

Shown to his room, he opened the wrong closet first and was fairly staggered by the result of Engracia's neglect. What dignified bachelor expects to see in his bedroom closet, awaiting him, a collection of girlish finery! Poor Engracia's frocks were innocent enough, all but one little piece of Paris coquetry passed down from Clare — the petted member of the lot. Its blandishments were spread on the only silk-padded hanger right in front, and it looked like a court beauty in banishment — probably deserved — amidst the humbler ladies of her suite. The low bosom, the no-sleeves, the one great rose, were frivolty itself to a man of imagination. Cornish decidedly had imagination if he chose to use it, but this was the last form of appeal to it he had expected to encounter here. His ideas of the Torres Tract centered in hard times, death, and retrenchment — and lo, a Paris ball-gown! A man may not know how he knows, but any man of Cornish's experience generally does know when Paris is writ all over a piece of feminine dry goods.

It was another surprise that there should be a grown-up daughter in the house — but for that, at least, Engracia was not to blame. He smiled grimly while his bath-water roared, and took out a more eveningish suit which he had brought for use in San Francisco.

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It was years ago, one winter, — the Rivingtons were sailing for the Bahamas, — that Mr. Rivington had said, “I wish you would pick out some books for those Scarth children and get them out there about Christmas.” Cornish asked their number and ages, feeling much bored. . . . “And while you are about it, some for the mother, too, — novels, you know: I know you do know! Don’t be condescending; choose the best.”

Letters of thanks duly followed and were forwarded. Mr. Rivington had a habit of keeping letters. Subsequently he came across one in a childish hand from the little girl reader on the Torres Tract. He showed it to Cornish as his reward, and Cornish felt distinctly rewarded: he thought it a very unusual letter from a child of that age, and said so.

“Well, I wondered if I were mistaken!” Mr. Rivington added. The following year he said, “You succeeded so well last time, suppose you try again; and remember the kiddies are a year older.” This time Cornish was indebted partly to his own interest for his marked success, and thereafter the commission was fixed upon him. He did remember that kiddies grew older, yet he continued to see always a little girl of about twelve watching the mails at Christmas time for that parcel from New York. Perhaps he had not tried to see her otherwise.

“I think I shall have to explain, some day,” Mr. Rivington smiled, over one of those rewarding little letters which so pleased his fancy. “I’m beginning to feel too much of a fraud in this business.”

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"Oh never!" said Cornish. "That would be an anti-climax and mix them all up. Leave it simple for their sakes."

Down under the apple trees, the women were discussing him, as a matter of course.

"Dear, *dear!*" said Engracia; "he must be making a toilet. I am perished for my tea."

"He looked quite capable of it."

"What does he look like?"

"Like a New Yorker in English clothes just off the Marysville stage." Mrs. Scarth laughed softly at some recollection not worth putting into words.

"Now, how much of that did he actually thrust upon you?" Engracia knew her mother's unconscientious adjectives.

"Not any of it, in fact. He is very nice, but he won't be any less deadly on that account."

"Why is he deadly if he is nice?" Engracia pretended to plead for the outcast in English clothes.

"Well, dear, as I told you, the 'worm's-eye view.' Once it was off in New York at a desk;—he was just a secretary; now it's here and it's the whole thing. Valuation is Mr. Cornish's strong point"

Engracia frowned. "Are n't we valuable?"

"Scarcely — at present. We are an 'asset' now."

"But is n't he going to have any imagination about us, as Mr. Rivington had?"

"My dear child, men of imagination are not picked out for executors and trustees."

"But there is another trustee?"

"A woman: she will be guided by his report."

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“Are n't we anything at all?”

“We always were, I suppose, a sublime sort of speculation. The prophets like your father have usually been without honor in their own generation. Mr. Rivington had great ideas about the use of money, when he was alive to make more. It's different when it comes to leaving all you have to some one else's discretion. And he died so suddenly — no doubt he expected to have seen the end of this scheme before his own end came. But even when he was living, he left the mean part to this man.”

“What part?”

“The part he did n't like: — for instance, saying, ‘You are spending money like water out there. You have had five thousand for every one you have sent back’ — and so forth. Those may have been his very own words; they were his secretary's words when they reached us, ‘per G. C.’”

“‘G. C.’ was not mean for himself, then?”

“Hardly any of us are mean for ourselves; but meanness is meanness, and that side of business usually goes to those who are fitted for it. And so I say — ‘the worm's-eye view.’”

“In New York, it seemed pitiful the numbers of young men confined to nothing but clerk's stools all day and horrid boarding-houses at night. Some of them might have had ‘dauntless breasts’; — hardly any of them could have been meant for nothing else but the ‘worm's-eye view.’ I wish you had not started that phrase, mamma.”

“I borrowed it.”



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"Please borrow another, then: 'valuation' is better — comparative values; that's the whole question, is n't it?"

"I think the question is, what standard do you go by?"

"If a man's work keeps him down to the commercial standard, there is your tragedy. To be sure, he might take a day off now and then and see things for himself."

"— When you have lost the power?—that's your tragedy: never to have a day off. He has those dense, sad eyes; you see such eyes in disappointed men."

"Then you did see something else besides his English clothes?"

"Mr. Rivington wore English clothes," the widow mused on the good past. "He was a beautiful old dandy; he used to come speckless off the stage. You must remember his nice fat handshake."

"I remember his nice fat kiss. He liked little girls." Engracia leaned back in her creaking garden chair and put her finger-tips together: it will be seen that conversation was livelier already for the stimulus of a stranger in the house. "I wonder if he really could have bought all those books he used to send us?" (Was this mental suggestion?) "Somehow I can't fancy his choosing just those books. His might have been more costly, but —"

"Yes," the mother understood — "still he was a very wonderful person; you could n't tell what he would do, or what side-fancies he kept to himself."



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That was our day-spring of hope out here. They were a wonderful pair! The strange thing was, they were not men you would call young: as I say, it is youth nowadays that is 'old and suspicious and wise.' I like the men of my own generation, I confess. They knew, at least, what they wanted to do."

"I remember Mr. Rivington a little: he was a fascinating person — and so was papa. Men like those must be rare in any generation."

"Yes, yes! it was a feast to be with them. The old dining-room heard some brave talk in those days. I never knew one pay the other a compliment. It used to alarm me, their after-dinner bouts, contradicting each other — till I saw them go off like two boys in the morning. Mr. Rivington used to say he came out here to grow young. I think he loved it almost as we did, but he mourned over his dead mines up in the hills. He wanted to see their 'bones washed with water,' as he said. Well, he was a genius. It takes genius to make a man rich without making him mean."

"Hard, again, on the men who have no genius! It takes character to look after the works of genius. Anyhow, if we are to be weighed in dollars and cents, we ought to remember they are n't his dollars and cents."

"I shall remember," said Mrs. Scarth. It is doubtful if she could remember anything but the long strain of "per G. C." at her back. All costs of maintenance, their little water-system, which made the garden of her joy — barns and fences, painting,

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plumbing — many little details much more intimate, had to her knowledge passed under his inspection for years, in the shape of vouchers labeled "Torres Tract." Scarth never worried about G. C. It was department work, each man in his place, and Rivington smiled on both. He knew that Scarth knew his own job too well to be thrown out of his stride by the twitch of the rein. When needful he took his head and ploughed along.

"I am glad his first meal is tea. We are always presentable at tea," Engracia remarked incautiously.

"You are not. Look at your skirt!" Mrs. Scarth pointed to the wreck of a clean piqué with marks of dog-paws evident to the most casual eye.

"I did n't allude to clothes," said Engracia meekly.

"I did. I wish you'd go and change that skirt."

"I did change it — before luncheon. Dog-paws, dear mother, are liable to occur at any time."

"You are so weak about him."

"He was burying a bone in the cosmos-bed. Had to apologize!"

"You should n't let him do it that way. Step on his hind paws when he jumps up on you."

"His front ones get there first. It was such a good sign; he has n't been bad for so long."

"Please do as I ask you!"

"This is my next to last — I must keep one for Sunday morning."

"Dress for dinner, then."

"At five o'clock — in black voile?"

"Have n't you anything left that's white?"

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“Mamsy, it’s such devastating weather. Don’t let’s talk of clothes! — Come, Bran: laziest man in the world! — Nobody loves us; we go.”

Cornish saw them romping down to the vegetable garden where a bed of zinnias rustled and drank sunshine. He had just stepped out looking for signs of life. The white dog and white girl mingled with the colors of the zinnias and passed out of sight.

When the question of clothes got upon the girl’s nerves it brought out all the temper she possessed. She could have borne the doctrine of their necessity preached by any one but her mother who could preach in a so much better way. But her own side did not suffer by any means, in the argument that invariably ensued. “The first thing any ordinary American climber learns is how to dress:—*ergo*, dress is cheap. Leave it to the cheap — ‘lest we lose our Edens, thou and I.’” Armed with a lucky quotation, she would come off victor for the moment; but mothers have the weight of custom at their backs. This mother feared that her child’s precocious philosophy might degenerate into slackness or mark her as queer — fatal word.

“Between those who are smart in this world and those who are not smart, a great gulf is fixed” was another way of begging the question. “We are not born smart and we can’t afford the experts who thrust it on you. As a sheer personal achievement for you and me, mamma, it would kill all the rest. Can’t you believe in the things that really matter, for your child, as you did for yourself?”

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"There are no more men nowadays who can see the soul of a girl if she does n't know how to dress."

"Ah, I thought it was that," came the bitter reply. "You are afraid I may never be married. — If that's true, what you say, I don't want to be. I should think, mamsy, you'd begin to look at these things from your own son's side — clothes and what they lead to. Tom has got the heart-ache of his young life, I should n't wonder, seeing Clare on our steps dressed out in all that witchery. Dressed as I am mostly, I think he could have borne up."

"I don't care how it's done, but when the right man comes, I want him to succumb."

"Well, for frankness I've seldom seen the equal of this mother of mine!"

"I believe in frankness between a mother of my sense and a daughter of yours. I believe in marriage too."

"You'll never see me married — to a man who looks at my clothes. I won't look at him, that's certain."

Himself, seated in Scarth's chair at Scarth's desk in the office a few moments before dinner, heard a scuffle on the stairs. Bran, more or less head-over-heels, burst through the curtain smiling broadly on the company, and presented, as it were, Engracia, my best girl. Everybody smiled. Engracia behind him, missing the joke, came in with her part rather stiffly. She saw no occasion for so much smiling.

The black voile with its half-sleeves and transpar-

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ent yoke conveyed as much of youth and future summers as a dress of that character might: Cousin Anna had clothed her tender pity for the girl's first sorrow in this appealing little frock. It appealed to Cornish in a different and grimmer fashion.

Valuation, — Caroline had said well, — perhaps undervaluation, was his errand there. He knew this family's circumstances too intimately to miss a single point in their outlook, sordidly speaking. He had thought often of their isolation, he had fed their growing children's minds with books after his own bookish fancy; he understood the ambition for good schools, the separations, the expensive journeys it entailed, but there must have been sacrifices — dress, he supposed would have been the first one; it did not look like it. His city-bred eye could not miss the style, the "class," expressed in that admirable little dinner-frock in which Cousin Anna had succeeded but too well. Here was this girl in a house on the Marysville road — a house builded on sand — on silt, to be exact — dressed as Mrs. Rivington herself might have been dressed on such an occasion with no discredit to her fortunes.

Extraordinary creatures of one idea women were! They cling to dress as the last plank in poverty to save their self-respect. In a way, it was heroic, but was it honest? He was come to break up this child's home or to reduce its incomes to the breaking — heart-breaking-point. Who was to pay the difference? A young brother, perhaps, with his life, liberty, and personal happiness. He had known in his own youth



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the cost of such sacrifices. Or must she turn out and earn her own frocks? She was of the old type—the protected product of special conditions and highly wrought influences, interesting but infinitely tragic as he saw her—as undoubtedly she did not see herself. Hereyes, dark-lashed, deeply intelligent, thoughtful, and doubtless gentle eyes, met his with a caustic, measuring, perfectly realized hostility. “We have nothing for each other: let us pass with civility and a wide berth.”

Not Bran, however. He conned the stranger with careful sniffings, approved the bouquet, and sat down against his well-clad leg and left white hairs on his trousers. The women chid him, and they all went out to dinner.

Dangerously carrying are clear young tones in a silent summer night. He had asked for his candle early (a figure of speech, for candles at Roadside were kept on bedroom tables), and Tom had gone up with him and advised leaving his door open for coolness. He did not go to bed, but sat and smoked by the window. Moon had just turned off the lawn-sprinklers—a silence falling on the garden brought voices to his ear speaking on the piazza steps below.

“I’m *so* thankful he’s gone! How many evenings, I wonder, are we to go through like this?” Cornish stepped to his door and softly closed it. Engracia went on chattering to her mother, silly with the sense of pressure removed. “It was suttently hateful of me to cut and run this afternoon, but I has my fits! Now,



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if I had n't on my very best, I'd whip into the laundry and wash out dog-spots, just to please the mistress of this house and the mamsy of my heart!" — followed a hasty caress.

"Leave it in there, anyhow; you can't wear it again, and if Moon is n't too busy he may see it and take the hint."

Moon was busy in his kitchen till late, baking fruit-cake in a slow oven. (Nobody wanted fruit-cake, but he considered it the proper thing to have.) Half an hour later he hung it immaculate (not the fruit-cake) on the knob of Engracia's door. The Chinese voice, that can screech and cackle like a wild animal, has inflections also that speak of tender feelings we know they never can convey in English words.

"Good girl," he crooned to himself, going down the passage; "heap, *heap* good — all same boss! Nobody come to marry." Passing another door, he grinned meaningly: "Plenty lich — too ol', too ol'!"

## CHAPTER XVI

"THEY," as the men were conveniently styled by the women of the house, went off early after breakfast talking of affairs.

"You will surely be home to tea?" Mrs. Scarth detained her son to ask. "*Do* be! Moon is making —"

"Not likely," Tom interrupted; he was in a hurry. "Don't wait for us." Whereupon the mistress hastened to the kitchen to save Moon the trouble of making fresh apple-cake with nuts on top. He made it just the same!

About four, Engracia went upstairs to take her robes out of the borrowed closet, and fell into the snare of a precious old Meredith novel lying in plain sight on G. C.'s table. There were several reasons why she had missed reading it before. She stood one hour entranced, thinking each moment would be the last. Buggy-wheels drove up—she heard no more than the dead. "They" were indoors and *he* was coming up—in new Putmon boots that massacred the redwood stairs—before her position dawned upon her. She shut the book on a button—a loose one she had been fingering in the excitement of grappling at high speed those subtle, packed first chapters of "Richard Feverel." Whipping up her muslins from the bed and with Clare's little Paris rag borne high before her on its hanger, she sailed out of the

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door and almost into Cornish's arms. He made way for her and her load of frippery, sarcastically ; her face was one high blush. Clothes again, plague on them ! — she did not say, " Books again ! " — she forgave herself cribbing out of other people's private mangers. Her head was still full of the opening, rich with promise, she had left, and half her fine color was pure thrill from its bitter, matchless workmanship.

" Excuse me ! I was just taking my things out of your other closet : awfully stupid of me to leave them there."

" Sorry ! I have plenty of room — more than I have at home."

" Well, I've got them now, thanks." She hurried down the passage.

He emptied his pockets of letters, and piled them neatly on the table. His favorite of all Meredith's lay where he had left it, yet it had been shut lately at a new place. Between the leaves some hurried reader had dropped a small, smoked-pearl button which did not otherwise define itself in his mind except as a mate for those on a certain young lady's morning gingham. So much for circumstantial evidence.

Subsequently he went downstairs to dinner, with his case complete. Engracia met him all unconscious, dressed as usual for the evening in her one and only. He smiled sadly and offered her his book : " You will find," he said, " your book-mark in its place."

She had blushed at sight of the volume, and as she took it the guilty button dropped to the floor between them. He restored it ceremoniously : " A vous ? "

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She blushed deeper, but rallied enough to say, "Thanks, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Very clever! But could n't you have sup-pressed the button?"

"But don't we need our buttons? I need all mine."

"Personally, I don't care to be tracked about the house like Peggoty by a trail of buttons. One crime at once is enough."

"Who wouldn't rather read Meredith than sew on his buttons?"

"*Her* buttons?"

"Where is the difference?"

"You must have got some new ideas about us, if you don't see any — *us*, I mean!"

"I mean you, certainly."

"Well!" she cried. "Then you don't think our lives depend on our — buttons?"

"No; nor what you sew them on—though I grant" (he glanced at the invidious black voile) "they are very charming!"

"You really think a woman's salvation does not depend on clothes—nor even her 'hopes of happiness'?"

"Happiness! clothes are the destruction of your happiness—American women. You have n't the hardihood that supports an Englishwoman under any old thing she chooses to put on if she knows she's a lady. You never know—you ask your clothes. You pin your confidence on a thing like that you were carrying out of my room this afternoon—I thought to myself, 'There goes the banner of the Faith!'"

"What thing?" cried Engracia, with triumph in

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her eye. She warmed toward him suddenly as an unexpected ally.

"I suppose it was French, that ensign you carried before you? I saw your utter prostration in the very way you held it."

"*That* belonged to my débutante cousin! Don't suspect *me* of that! You don't suppose we wear Doucet gowns in this house unless they are flung us by our rich relations! Clare has 'banners' like that to burn. And I assure you she does n't worship them blind! I forget what was the matter with this! But, oh," she continued, "do say these things sometime when mamma can hear you! I have a point to make. I shall overcome her in those very words."

He was flattered by the greater ease of speech between them. "Do you differ on the question of — buttons?"

"I can't explain; but do just let her hear you! That is, if you really mean it?"

"You can't imagine how much I mean it," he answered seriously. — "But — about this book?"

"Oh, you must n't! it's coals of fire, you know —"

"That is n't what I mean! But it's much too old for you — and it has" — he hastened to say as she tried to interrupt — "a mistaken, a wanton ending. Have you ever read what Stevenson said about it?"

"Yes; and I was in the midst of that scene he calls the most exquisite prose in the language, when you caught me 'with the goods.'"

"You must finish it now, of course. But it will make

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you wretched; it's wisdom of a sort you might have waited for."

"Mamma talks about it, too, the same way, but I know she would let me read it now: we did n't happen to possess the book. — You have n't finished it yourself, I'm afraid."

"Long ago — I read it periodically" — "when I am blue," he might have added, "and slightly discouraged." Failure loves to muse on the great tragedies of failure.

"Do you enjoy being wretched, too?"

"I enjoy truth — which is much the same thing."

She bore away her treasure, to find, on opening it, her own name over his on the fly-leaf with "Miss" before it and "from" beneath. There were also two lines which he had tried to erase — presumably written sometime before: —

"Life is not beauty — it is found in vain,  
But beauty is the broken heart of life."

A strange person — who might be strangely companionable would he but let himself be so. How had she let herself go so recklessly, she wondered — probably the bad effects of "Richard Feverel."

It was the same evening, a clammy heat in the air. The men were in the office smoking and perspiring over that old question, how to stop leaks in expenditure without making the process cost more than the leaks.

"I don't understand this road account for 1903. Have we such a mileage as that to keep up?"



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"Most of that work was done on a county road that crosses us," Tom replied.

"Don't your counties repair their own roads?"

"Generally speaking, they should, if they knew how. We cut up that road ourselves, hauling in winter on narrow tires. My father thought we ought to leave it at least as good as we found it."

"Does the company do its own teaming?"

"We hire the farmers in winter. You can't persuade 'em narrow tires are harder on their horses as well as on the roads."

"Can't you make it compulsory to use broad tires?"

"We do, and they kick, although we buy the tires."

"I noticed that item," said Cornish dryly. "I supposed there was an answer."

"That's the answer."

"I wish," said Mrs. Scarth on the front porch, speaking low to Engracia, "Tom could cure himself of that habit of wagging one foot when he talks."

"I should think," Engracia murmured from the steps, "when a boy is being sweated like that, he might be allowed to wag both feet if it helped any."

"I could see him so clearly, all those years while he was gone, and when he came home the first look told me he was all right: — now I see his little blemishes again."

"We saw *him*, when he wasn't here. Now we watch his feet."

"Not you — only his mother, with the eye of a groundling. Why should n't I hate it in others; I'm so tired of it in myself!"

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"You don't have it always; and boys had manners in your time. Mothers are the drill-sergeants; they have to nag raw troops."

"No, no; Tom is n't raw. I'm always wrong about Tom. When you get a boy of that type, sane and clever and austere, and yet gentle and charitable, — maintaining himself through all pressure absolutely, — you can't expect the attitudes of body to match his soul. But I don't demand it so much for myself — it's for 'when thou goest a-wooing, Philip, my king!'"

"If he woos the right girl, she'll know what he is, or she'll deserve to lose him."

"My dear, there is nothing so heart-rending as to see a perfectly splendid man fail to win the woman he loves just because of the lack of charm. The 'little less' or the 'little more.'"

"Well, mamsy, we can't lick it into him — nor into her, to make her feel what some other girl might feel without so much worry. It's on the lap of the gods."

Again the voice of Cornish from inside. "What about this Dixie Cañon flume? That's a new one on me. I don't recall any Dixie Cañon flume account?"

"There has n't been any up to now. Father made a deal with those fellows who live up there: they were stealing water right along. He gave them a little more and the line to keep up. We keep one ditch-tender, but one is not near enough."

"What is your greatest trouble up there?"

"Winter — twenty feet of snow; ditches clogged; flumes loaded with ice; trees blown across our wires."

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The men who live there have nothing to do all winter but watch for trouble. What they do is done on the spot at the right time."

"Why can't this arrangement go on?"

"There have always been objections to it. We don't sell them water, but it comes to the same thing, and they use it to break the law."

"Washing gold?"

"In a small way, of course: poor men who spent all they had on their placers—which the law has shut down; we know how it is ourselves. They have never admitted the justice of it. No one admits it up there, or they could n't stay! Every house on those roads holds a friend and almost every house holds a spy. If you can't give a satisfactory account of yourself, word flies like touching the button. Before you get where anything could be seen, water 's off—all quiet in the gulches."

"If they steal water anyhow, and we can't afford to keep up that line with men of our own, I don't see but they have us on the hip."

"They certainly have! We need n't take any equivalent for what they steal, though. It has been brought down to facts quite lately that they don't confine themselves to their own ground. They poach on the owners next door in Plumas County. Mr. Ludwell, president of a big power company in the city, called my attention to it when I was down. He sees our difficulty, but he thinks we are a bit too neighborly with our friends up there. It looks so."

"It seems to have been a tacit kind of friendship?"

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"Yes, rather too tacit. It's bad to have friends you don't care to own;—good fellows enough, but we are n't in that business. My father never liked it. But, as you say, they had us cinched. If we cut 'em off and make our own repairs, they will take the hint fast enough. We are very exposed up there—a long, weak line."

"What would your father have done about it finally, do you know?"

"Cut off that line entirely."

"Are n't there damage suits against water-sellers for non-delivery?"

"We use that water ourselves—irrigation. If the placers should be worked again,—I mean our own placers,—we'd need it there first; use it all, then send it down with the silt it carries onto our company lands. My father laid out those linked areas I showed you to-day, for his silt exhibit. He was just getting to it—basin irrigation on the Egyptian plan: the application would differ here in detail, of course, but the value of the silt is the same. It was that he wanted to prove to his kindergartners."

"Who were they?"

"Oh, his farmers."

"I know the general scheme," said Cornish, speaking carefully.

"He wanted to handle it himself first, and show them."

"And if we find that we can't afford to show them, what do we do with that ditch-line?"

"Keep on dickering with our illicit neighbors, or

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fix it ourselves and cut off their water and risk reprisals, or abandon our ten years' work on those lands we have now under cultivation. The nut orchards are a prime investment; hay is always high; hops just beginning: hops look good to me."

"Your hop-ovens cost enough."

"I suppose so. I was in Korea."

"You learned a good bit about irrigation out there?"

"Yes, on this same system — flooding."

"You would hardly undertake to fill your father's place in this scheme?"

"On the contrary, I believe I might: the work is all laid out and I am rather confident I could carry it through."

"To be frank with you, Scarth, I have not talked with a single engineer — and I talked to a good many before I came out here — who did not say basin irrigation for this valley full of farmers is a dream. There are too many conflicting interests and people's parties and crank legislation and voters who don't know what it means — nobody knows; and everybody would be afraid of it. You would need a monarchy to do it, and men as cheap as — silt."

"I had supposed that Mr. Rivington talked with engineers — others than my father."

"Mr. Rivington was a monarchy, so far as this tract is concerned; there was no one to limit him but himself, and he did not look at the scheme commercially alone. It was one of his humanitarian hobbies — monarchs have them. But in his will these lands



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are classed with other investments which are expected to give an account of themselves in dividends. I am frank with you. There is a beautiful directness about your father's scheme which would appeal to any one who knows what your fight out here means, between the two great interests. Our placers did not come cheap, and there they lie—the real wealth of the grant."

"Nothing comes cheap. My father thought it would pay to teach the miners and the farmers how to work together—the waste of one should be the wealth of the other. The saying is, 'as rich as mud.' Volumes have been written by the great irrigation men on the value of mud."

"It was a cosmic idea, of course, and no wonder it captured a man like Rivington. He had read on the subject largely himself. He saw it in the light of history—which misleads, you know. We are not a British Protectorate—and men were cheap in Egypt of the Ptolemys. For this tract alone, I've no doubt the money could be raised, but I have small hope that the State would ever help us any, on a general scheme for the whole valley. San Francisco would kick, to begin with. She does n't put money into the valley—she wants the valley to put money into her. But we need go no further than the fact that it is speculating on a heroic scale with the fortune of heirs who are minors, though I dare say Mrs. Rivington could be talked over: that's what I meant with regard to this tract alone."

"I don't think my father would have believed in



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booming it — he believed in it commercially, granting time."

"Shall we have another go at Dixie Cañon, or have we done enough for to-night?"

"Just as you say — it's not late, though."

"You could not do much this year, could you?"

"I can't answer that question till I've been up there again. I should like to take you up with me."

"I should like to go."

"And there is a bridge — on the Rough-and-Ready Road: it's been boarded up a year, waiting for repairs. The county ought to fix it, but the county is slow — and poor. And it's a fact, we use it more than any of our neighbors. I'd like to see it in commission again — if only to save some one else, perhaps, what that barricade cost us."

Cornish raised his eyes gravely. "Six hours," said Tom, "racing against time, when they brought my father down. That delay, they said, was fatal. Still," he added proudly, "that was not a company affair."

"The company could not afford to lose your father," said Cornish, speaking with the effort it costs one man to enter upon questions of feeling with another, but the intention was as deliberate as the words were formal. "His death was a personal blow to Mr. Livingston. Your telegram with the announcement was found in his private diary the morning he was killed. There was no entry for the day — only the words in pencil: —

"'Death closes all: but something ere the end,  
Some work of noble note may still be done.'"

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Cornish had not expected any answer from Tom — he merely wished him to know how his father's friend and co-worker had regarded the task they left undone, both removed within a day of each other. He looked out through the open door onto the verandah. The lawn-sprinklers were softly misting in the dark. No wind stirred in the great oak's leafy chambers where its tenants were nested for the night. The women's voices came in low regular murmurs from the steps.

"Delicious, those oleander blossoms on this damp air! Your mother's little garden smells like a court in Sicily. What luxury that would mean in New England — oleanders, like lilacs, along a dooryard fence."

"As a matter of fact, lilacs would mean more luxury here."

"I think we must fix that bridge," said Cornish, rising. "I suppose the county will do something toward it? Is that a job you would feel equal to bossing?"

"If the county will have me. It has its own engineer."

"Did we help to elect him?"

"We helped the other man!"

Cornish laughed at this new hitch in the narrow little local game. "Is that why the bridge wasn't fixed in a hurry?"

"I could n't say — but if we do it ourselves, we can do it as we like and when we like."

"Go ahead, then, and do it. It does n't mean a new bridge, does it?"

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“Oh, not as bad as that. Fifteen hundred or so will make it safe for another twenty years.”

“Think of a bridge in Europe built to last twenty years !”

## CHAPTER XVII

"How does it go, boy dear?" Mrs. Scarth detained her son for a hasty word at bedtime. "Does n't he say anything definite?"

"He asks questions, mostly," Tom answered.

"Does he seem at all pleased with the way things look?"

"He has n't said so: — don't worry, mother," he added as her face fell. "Good-night."

She ignored his dismissal. "You don't even know if they will want you to stay?"

"It's only the first day, remember. He's not at all hard to get on with."

She made him stoop for her good-night kiss and released him; well she knew that vague look in his young tired eyes which showed that he did not hear.

Upstairs she and Engracia talked long in the girl's room. The couch at the bed's foot was heaped with those wretched little muslins — Clare's pink creation trailed from its hanger on the lamp-bracket. "I did n't put them away," she apologized. "We must think of some one to give them to."

"You may be very glad of them yourself some day," her mother answered significantly.

"Not those clothes!"

"They can be made over —"

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"Ah, I did not mean the fashions!" Engracia murmured. Caroline did not misunderstand.

"Neither did I. Luxuries of feeling are not for us, dear. We must learn to save, at the cost of everything but decency."

Engracia hesitated a second: "Are we so excessively poor, mamma?"

"That depends. Would you like to go back East with me and live with Uncle Benjamin?"

"And accept our living from him?"

"I have about enough for us to dress on. It would be a gracious and a kindly living, and I don't suppose he would ever feel it."

"But you would feel it?"

"I should like death better; that's not the question. Tom will be where his work is; it's only my girl, my sensitive girl, I worry about."

"'McCarthy r'ared them very peevish,'" Engracia quoted as one way of looking at this boasted sensitiveness. Hesitating, she asked, "Was there nothing at all left for you, mamma? It *is* a question of you."

"My dear, we could n't live on papa's salary from the company, and educate our children."

"How did we live, then? Are we in debt?"

Caroline shook her head. "I will tell you — sometime: it's a long story and I must tell it right, now that I'm the only one left to tell it. It was the one hitch between us — the only time we ever failed to see an important question the same way."

"We must n't postpone things," said Engracia. "You have always said I saw things as he did."

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"Yes, you do ; — but you ought to go to bed, dear."

"I don't want to go to bed : it's exciting to have one's executioner in the house — at meals, and sitting around — so friendly-like, just as if he were n't going to sell us up to-morrow."

"Tom says he is easy to get on with."

"Tom gets on with anybody ; we're exacting."

"What do you miss in him?"

"I don't miss anything : he is all too much there. I was downright sassy to him this afternoon : he drives you to it, looking at you so."

"Looking at you — how ? he does n't look at me," said Caroline innocently and rather alarmed, Engracia being, like her father, strong in her likes and dislikes which she took little pains to hide.

"Never mind him ; he's the future — let him wait. I want to know all about ourselves — if you are not too tired?"

"I am never tired when there is any talking to be done." Caroline did not go on at once after this glance at her familiar weakness — sign in itself that she found her story difficult, even to tell Engracia, that born listener which Providence sometimes grants a talkative woman in the bosom of her family. Engracia sat forward in her low chair and clasped her elbows to keep her hands still (they had tricks that bothered her when she did not watch them).

"Well, dear ; it was ten or twelve years ago — when we had come to the question of schools, and we could n't make up our minds to be humble about our children. Suddenly, your father learned what he



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might be making somewhere else. An offer came to him from one of his best old friends, a great engineer — Allerton Voorhees. He is dead now ; and he never quite forgave, I think, the slight to his offer that he had waited so long to make. It was to go out to South Africa for a famous London company with investments all over the world. It meant a great professional future, to be the right hand of such a man. With his backing it would have made our fortune. The golden chance that comes once and once only — and I'm afraid that I was the stumbling-block.

“ I understood all the arguments : those were his best years — what he failed to do then for his children could never be made up ; and though money does not mean reputation to an engineer with other engineers, it does with outsiders. Pride came into it : he knew this work here would never show results in his lifetime to justify all his prophecies. Gold is *there* — any one can see that kind of success. But my reasons were feelings — vague dread, and that inertia which grows upon women in a life like this. I think it's good for us, you know, but it makes us hate changes. And how I loved it here ! Can any one imagine why ! I grew to love the very smell of the summer dust — the silence of our heats ; the rooms we made ourselves and filled with our own dreams. Papa loved it too, but he turned it all down. He sent in his resignation with regrets, almost with apologies. He had worked so hard for Mr. Rivington's confidence in what he wanted to do here — then to back out himself on a question of salary !

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"Mr. Rivington met him in his own handsome fashion. 'The Board can't raise you,' he wrote, 'but I can. Let me know the least you can afford to stay for. I am not, of course, the Rand!' —

"Well, I may say the flesh dropped off me while this thing was in the air. It meant to leave Tom, his first years away from home; or if I stayed with you children, the separations again! There had been so many — only this one home! Two months by letter and back, and if anything should happen to papa — he was never well — those turns that we did not understand. . . . I begged him to be modest. I wanted his figures to be met. The one thing I believe he wanted most he never spoke of: that association with a big work-brother, a man of his own cast of mind, his leader and his friend. He cared greatly for Mr. Rivington, but not as one 'artificer' cares for another — the man who understands."

"Blessed mother, you need not apologize to us for sticking to the home."

"I'm apologizing to him. It is one of those unconquerable regrets. . . . Well, he was moderate — for my sake; he was almost humble. He asked about half his earning capacity, according to that offer, and Mr. Rivington met him out of his own pocket. He was practically the company, but he would n't force the small stockholders into risks outside of strict business — I don't know how to put these things. Then, Uncle Benjamin began to think about those school-bills too — he has always been like an own father to me. For my part, it would have hurt less

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to take that family money for you children, to make you a credit to the family, than Mr. Rivington's private check—but that would have been help. Papa wanted what he was worth, in the open market. I mustn't forget—Cousin Tom offered, too, most handsomely, but that was different again: there were personal reasons—no need to explain. It simply could n't be, in that case. It was the one sore subject between us—no, no! not Cousin Tom! we were perfectly agreed there—Mr. Rivington's subsidy, I mean. Papa would not see it that way—it was part of his rightful salary, he felt. He would n't even call it a loan. And if it were a loan, he said, 'my life and time are security: I sacrifice a good deal more than Rivington to the future of this work.' Still, we never liked to talk of it, though I know it has puzzled some very good friends of ours how we have got on. And now it's Tom's life and work we are living on, and no pride or delicacy, or anything must stand between us and niggardly economy."

Engracia rose and walked about the room seeking things to do with her hands.

This aspect of the family circumstances had never been presented to her young mind before, though the necessity of doing so had been discussed often by her parents.

"If I can't take care of one wife and one daughter, what in heaven's name am I good for! We don't want her off somewhere earning her living—we want her here with us." Scarth, of course, did not share the modern theory that an incomeless wife and

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daughter are "parasites." So, now, it was a question for Engracia to solve for herself.

"I must do something, mamma. I wonder what I am good for."

"An old lady's companion," her mother answered promptly. "Will you be mine?—You can have a position with me, right here on the spot, without a single reference."

"You can't afford me, dear. I should expect more than my board and clothes."

"Not while you are in training. Think how I shall exercise you in all the necessary virtues! I'll promise to be as trying as I can."

"I believe I could be such a thing as a 'social secretary,' if I were not too social. Is my handwriting stylish enough?"

"Your writing may be, but you are not. Smartness may have its uses, you see."

"I shall look for a lady, you understand—a real lady."

"I hope you won't look for her in San Francisco!—don't interrupt—on Cousin Anna's account. She would have you on her mind continually. You are not serious, dear?"

"Serious enough to wonder what the poor things are paid."

"Rather more than a governess and not near as much as a cook," the mother jeered, knowing nothing about it, naturally.

"I don't class myself with chefs in any department, but I may surprise you yet. It seems to be one

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of those things you can leave largely to Providence — the hope of the incompetent !”

“ Your friends will be your hope. We have no one here but the Ludwells. I should so hate to ask them for references — it would ‘call down checks upon our heads from Cousin Tom — I can’t take help from him, because — papa — ”

“ Of course not. He ’s our kindest kin, but not our kind. — Nobody is criticizing ; I don’t believe papa did — not much.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

WITHIN a few days Engracia took the first steps toward carrying out her plans, her mother consenting despondently. Tom was not advised of the matter; time enough to deal with him when there should be something definite to talk of. The women clung to these last precious hours together. They were rather more irritable with each other, and passionately repentant, feeling how time flew by. Engracia no longer practiced — she could not concentrate upon anything. She played over the old things her mother loved, which brought soft tears along with piercing memories. What are homes, after all, but “deserted nurseries,” or they break up before summer is done and cast their fledglings out helpless on the winds of fate.

And since the world is largely made up of misunderstandings, Cornish meanwhile was thinking that never had he seen a young woman who spent her time more profitlessly than this daughter of unsuccess, who in a home like that might, at least, have learned to put her hand to something practical. He was deeply concerned about her future, as he had no right to be. He had understood that several winters in New York (an exaggeration) had been given to the study of music — yet she never touched the piano in his hearing. She did not confide to him her custom



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of making the family beds, including his own: Moon could have shaken down a bed for a horse — further his skill in that line did not go. She followed him about on his sweeping rounds, dusting after him with a woman's touch. There were fresh flowers all over the house cut with strict justice to the garden; — no man knows what a chore this is in hot weather; but Cornish never saw her at the graceful task. He concluded, in short, that here was another fatal instance of the American father who thinks his own life and little means will never give out, and if they should it is the good God and not the Evil One who takes the hindmost.

Meanwhile, they jested and argued superficially; if they explored deeper, it was with a significant caution in testing each other's fundamental faiths and ideals of living. Books they generally agreed about, or they subtly pretended to disagree. Caroline thought very little about them except to notice a certain inconsistency between Engracia's occasional bursts of destructive criticism of their guest and her long conversations alone with him on the steps, now the cooler nights drove mothers indoors.

"Did Mr. Cornish know, do you suppose, about father's arrangement with Mr. Rivington?" Engracia asked once, after another plunge into that past which ceaselessly haunted Caroline.

"Of course his secretary knew."

"About those private checks?"

"They were personal, not 'private' — there was no secrecy about it in Mr. Rivington's office."

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"Had he anything to do with it when they stopped?"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean — who stopped it? did G. C.?"

"Death stopped it," said Caroline quietly. "Tom, of course, wrote what was necessary from us, to make it easy. He wrote to Mr. Cornish — to spare him writing."

"He seems to have been firmly mixed in with all our most private hurts. Shall we ever see his report on us, do you suppose?"

"Hardly, but it won't be difficult to know what it is. We shall know — when it is time to move out."

On three successive market-days an old Italian rancher named Morandi, with his little grandson to interpret for him, stopped to see Mr. Scarth on their way down the valley. They caught him at last one lunch-time and Tom went out to speak to them, the family at table inside listening, much amused.

A child's high treble sing-songed in English of the district-school, "He wants to know kin he have them bricks what's layin' out where the house was burnt, down our way quite a piece?"

"As far as I know, he can," Tom's voice replied.

This was conveyed by little Morandi to his grand-sire in their own tongue. "He wants to know, kin we take 'em to-day when we're goin' down along?"

The answer again seemed satisfactory. Thanks followed in an old man's husky tones. Heavy feet went trampling down the gravel followed by stump-

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ing of small new boots. A rush was made to collar Bran who resented these familiarities and had charged forth swearing. Cornish remained outside, discussing bricks with Tom.

"How much a thousand are bricks, counting freight and hauling?"

Bricks, it seemed, were unreasonably high considering they are made down the valley at Folsom — machinations of the "S. P."

"Think you could n't have made use of those bricks — in your hop-ovens, for instance?"

"They are not good bricks," said Tom — "been too long out on the ground."

"They would n't have been worth stacking under cover, you think? Labor is worth more than bricks?"

"They were n't our bricks." (Here the women chuckled shamelessly.) "They belonged to the squatter who built the house, long before our time; he went off and did n't take his chimney."

"If Tom had held onto those bricks!" Engracia whispered fiercely.

"Strictly speaking, they were not his to give away."

"They were his still less to keep, like a dog in the manger."

"Oh, well; *he* did n't know they were n't ours."

"Was the old policy as small as that?"

"Any policy that saves the company's money is not small: your father looked after the little things."

"Did he waste the good-will of our poor neighbors and set them against us for utter meanness?"

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speaking as selfishly as you like, I should think *that* would hardly pay!"

"Why so excited, child? It was a very small tale of bricks."

"It is n't the bricks, good Heavens! It's what it must make of a man's mind to be thinking of every brick."

"It's his own mind, dear, and his own business. It is what makes men rich."

"You did n't say that of Mr. Rivington."

"I said he left this part to—the man he finally trusted with all he had."

Outside, the men's voices were heard chatting pleasantly: "What do the Italians do with damaged bricks?" Cornish inquired.

"Build bake-ovens for their wives;—good cooks they are, too. We must go down to Morandi's some night and get his women to give us a *raviola* supper. If we let them have a day's notice they'll lay themselves out."

## CHAPTER XIX

CORNISH overstayed the dry season and no one wished him gone. He was there through the first September rain, and sat by the first autumn fire and thought it the sweetest evening of many years, though nothing marked it but a silence of sober folk who listened to the steady downpour outside, knowing what it meant "for the country."

In the night he heard the clear-up wind tumbling through the chambers of the oak, clashing its million little hard-finished leaves against the groaning house-roof. Half waking he wished for another blanket and instantly fell asleep again drugged by the change of air. Next morning it was as if one whole layer of atmosphere had been removed; he saw the great valley unveiled at last — "our alleged Buttes and our conjectural Coast Range" were no longer a fable for strangers.

Engracia was in the pantry, after breakfast, putting up lunch for two. There were fine points about a riding-lunch by no means to be entrusted to Moon. His part was slicing ham and passing it in on a kitchen plate through the serving-window. Cornish and Engracia were expected to eat this lunch somewhere on the way to Dixie Cañon — neither having had the least hand in the arrangement. Engracia was protesting her own innocence to Cornish, who had

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wandered in for a drink of water fresh from the filter. He loomed large in these domestic precincts and his spurs seemed inappropriate.

"Tom is the quick-decision board of this family," she explained elaborately. "As soon as he found you were not going to be ready on the moment, he went off alone in the buggy and left word for me to be your guide. He has a weird faith in my knowing these roads — I don't think I do, but if you are willing to trust me, I'll try to get you there."

"I should think we might risk it with all that ham along — ham and chicken too! — such good eats!" He stood over her and watched like a small boy while she matched her slices and trimmed her crusts.

"It would n't be proper, I suppose, to leave them on?"

"We leave ours on, but I had the fear of New York before me."

"And New York grudging every crust you have thrown away!"

"I'll put them all up in paper, specially for you."

"Thanks. — What an extraordinary nice place a pantry is," he murmured wistfully. "I could n't be allowed to stay, I suppose? You may be wasting something else if nobody's here to watch you. There's a slice of breast and two chicken-wings you have n't put in."

"Poor mamma's lunch! The wing is her choice part."

"I retreat in confusion. Now you might be generous, I think, to the fallen!"



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"Could I trust you to fill a thermos-bottle without breaking it? — the coffee is there at your elbow, boiling hot."

"In my experience of thermos-bottles, nothing comes out of them either as hot or as cold as we're led to expect," said Cornish, arguing from limited experience.

"— And they are the dickens to clean."

"Why do we take the blamed thing?"

"What will New York drink?"

"Is there no water on the road?"

"Perfect water, anywhere."

"Good Heavens; then why a thermos-bottle? — how this world fairly reeks with misunderstandings! — Now, what are you privately so amused about? Can't you pass it on? — passing things on is the very spirit of a pantry."

She passed on the smile without any tag to explain it — thinking: "New York is a different being this morning; is it the air or what?" But the wind went out of his sails, and he backed out of the pantry rather foolishly as her mother entered, preoccupied — showed tactless surprise at seeing them both there and asked Engracia if she had remembered the paper napkins.

An hour later they were following the trail along a land-drop some hundreds of feet sheer down to a gulch, bone-dry save where a few lost-looking manzanita sprouts seemed as if stuck by hand in the drifted sand. This was the lower part of the washings, but as they rode on, stones in wild heaps and

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tumbled boulders took its place — work of hydraulic mining before the anti-débris law. Tops of dead pines leaned on a level with their eyes, others clung half-uprooted to the disemboweled hill. The sluiced-out gulch, a hundred feet across to its opposite wall, lay quiet as death. The rain had done nothing here beyond filling a few pot-holes so far below they could hardly see them shine. But up the face of the cliff-side, thirty summers had done their work. A tide of young green life rushed upwards, catching hold, climbing on: hardly a raw spot of earth remained. Ceanothus, bear-weed, juniper, every species of thorn and native briar, running-oak and squaw's-mat and bracken turning gold, with what color-patches of wild flowers in spring fancy could supply. They sat their horses in silence, looking down.

"Have you ever read — but, of course, you have n't," Engracia paused: — "it's not a man's book."

"Even so I might have read it," Cornish smiled. "I'm afraid I'm only half a man in some of my reading."

"The hundredth man," Engracia corrected politely. "Well; does this place remind you of anything you have read — any description?"

"Now you speak of it — the first chapter in 'Arne': 'How the cliff was clad.'"

"Is n't it odd, we both should see it! But it's the same idea — the old scars that heal in spite of themselves?"

"And the other old scars," he added, "that are never going to heal, but they take their load of sand

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and even grow things on it. . . . You were pretty young for allegory, weren't you, when you read 'Arne'?"

"I did n't read 'Arne' till quite lately. 'The Happy Boy' and 'Synove,' mamma gave us first. Do you know," she questioned, pursuing her own thoughts, "if those books were ever the 'best-seller' kind?"

"Hardly, I think, the kind a bookseller pokes at you."

"So I supposed." They rode on at an easy pace, the trail descending. "You see, it was Mr. Rivington we owe Björnson to—and he sent us a perfect wonder of a 'Folk and Fairy Tales'—Scandinavian! I've never seen it in any other house. It was the loss of our youth! We lent it to one of those borrowers who don't take books seriously as they would the loan of a Butterick pattern. . . . Now, how could he have spent time to pick out such books for us? We had other books at Christmas, but none like his: they were a special brand of choice—ours, and mamma's, too. We read hers as fast as we grew up to them. It was the best part of our education—of mine!" Cornish listened with persuasive interest. "I remember, when we talked to him about them—after they were a part of us, you know—he seemed a little vague; he was pleased, but he did n't quite understand. He would, you know, if he had read them.

"Is an elderly gentleman expected to educate himself along with the little girls he gives books to?"

Engracia laughed. "I did n't see it that way exactly, but perhaps that *is* the way. Anyhow, I do wish

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we knew — who it was dealt with us so large-minded like, had such faith in a family of readers they had never seen and such great ideas about reading generally. We did n't bother our ungrateful heads about it then, but I've wondered since — it's an immense debt to somebody."

"Why not him?"

"Of course him — but some one else, too; — but I don't suppose I shall ever know."

"Such keen young detectives must have come pretty close to the heart of the mystery. You had your theories, no doubt?"

"I had a theory. It was rather presumptuous to drag in the beautiful Mrs. Rivington, but — you've seen her, of course? — she is young, and she looks at you —"

Cornish looked at her, in sharp surprise. "Where did *you* ever see her?"

"Only her picture. It stood on his table always when he was with us. It was one of my chores to dust his august room" — Engracia paused to laugh, parenthesizing — "I shall get into difficulties if I go on. But you need n't think I spend my life browsing on guest-room tables! I did hang over that picture sometimes, when I should have been doing my work; and I dreamed that she was our beautiful gift-fairy who thought of us every Christmas and knew exactly what we loved. Somehow the books were like her; and when I wrote my proper thanks to him, it was always her face, in the picture, I saw."

Cornish was silent; his smile of ironic amusement

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wiped out that dream at once and forever. "They were uncommonly good letters for a little girl to write, whoever may have inspired them," he answered guardedly.

"Where did *you* ever see my letters?" Engracia stared. Riding at her side—middle-aged, as she called him, passing grim—a beard, close-trimmed but yet a beard, covering his stiff half-smile—how could he have had anything to do with this cherished romance of her childhood!

"Must the gift-fairies always be young and beautiful? They were n't in my time. They were rather nasty customers with tempers you had to get on the right side of or they played you tricks.—Came when they were n't asked and gave you what you did n't want:—Prince Giglio, you know, and his gift of 'a little misfortune.'"

She scrutinized him and he winced; he was visibly embarrassed and talking at random to hide it. "Mr. Cornish," she cried, almost woundedly—"It was n't—it could n't have been you!"

No more was said; no more needed to be said. She saw what she had done. He made an effort to smile naturally—it was a failure. She knew that he had witnessed and fully comprehended her flat disappointment.

"Well, let me thank you now, for all the years when we thanked everybody else. It was a debt, and there is such a thing as interest, is n't there, added to the principal?"

"You must n't forget—Mr. Rivington always



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divided his thanks. That is how I came to read your letters."

"Then you have read my letters?"

"Some of them—they were among his papers, from the time you were twelve to—I believe I could tell your age precisely, but I was n't expecting to find you really grown up. And at first it was a disappointment. I used to think little girls ought never to be guilty of such a thing. Afterwards I forgave you—you did it so well." He gave a sudden strong sigh. They jogged along peacefully as if nothing were going to happen. "It came to be one of the nicest things at Christmas," he continued, "picking out those books for a little girl on the Marysville road, who read so straight to the mark. You were my little 'traveler in the realms of gold.'"

She questioned him with a look: "Yes; I wrote those words intrusively, on the fly-leaf of your 'Iphigenia.' Do you remember?"

"Do I remember—my first Greek tragedy!" Her eyes softened almost with tears. "What an amazing, willful goose I was—running all around Robin Hood's barn to find some one who was there all the time. The writing was so nice and strange—I thought it must be hers: I knew it was n't his."

"What does it matter? He got your letters and he cared for them. Now, if you still want to thank me for nothing—let me keep them, will you? I want them."

"Mr. Cornish! what perfect nonsense! Nobody ever kept my letters except my mother."



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"Somebody wants to keep them now. May I tell you why? I want every part of you — past and future — all to myself. My — dear, my little girl! Can't it be so?"

She was shocked as well as startled : he had grown completely pale and he struggled for breath to go on. Must she give him this needless pain, just as she was beginning to learn what it would mean to have had him for a friend?

"Those letters — make them the letters my — wife — wrote when she was a child — before we dreamed of this. Don't think I was educating you to be my wife. Heaven forbid! This is as great a shock to me as it is to you, my dear child. Come," he ended, seeing her blank dismay, realizing that he must give her time — "let me always buy your books. Come to me and read mine! This is no fatherly business — I'm in love with you — helplessly, ridiculously. What do you suppose has kept me out here so long? I could n't get up courage to speak and I could n't go away without speaking."

"Oh," she said, "I wish I could be that little girl again. I might have loved you, I think, if I had only known who you were. I can't believe the things I have thought and said about you, even since you came!"

"I can," said Cornish, who had heard some of them. "But no matter : begin back with me now and grow up to the idea. I can't tell you how patient I shall be. I am used to waiting."

She recalled that statement afterwards, when it

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seemed to have gained another significance ; but now she answered, " It would be the meanest selfishness in me to let you wait — no ; truly, I don't want to feel that way at all."

"Less toward me than others you could think of?"

"There are no others."

"Then I must wait." She looked at him in despair. But he could not save her now, all that his silence had held back. "I thought my first question would have been, 'Am I too old?' — and we have n't even got to that, it seems."

"You are too old — too everything — for an ignorant girl like me. That would not discourage me, though. Oh ! the trouble is, you offer me something I dare not take, and we both lose what we had before and did n't even know that we had it — if you can understand me."

"Of course, I understand. I can't let you refuse to go on with this. You must give me leave to write to you. Remember, I did n't know that you were here — you, as you are. And I did n't understand you at first. I was gone, just the same — from the very first night —"

"Excuse me!" — Engracia looked about her. "This must be Blue Tent we are coming to. We've nothing to do with Blue Tent ! Our road turns off three miles back. I've made you lose it."

"I have made *you* lose it."

"That's no way for me to get out of it. Six miles — nearly an hour and a half out of our way. Please forgive me !"

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"What is an hour to me — when I have waited for you all my life — and you give me nothing that I ask for?"

"I will give you something to eat, if you'll let me."

"Are we to picnic in Blue Tent? That will be cheerful!"

"We can fill our canteens there."

They rode on in silence and came into the one street of Blue Tent which has five saloons open and one schoolhouse shut. It has a pump also in front of its main hotel. A gaunt, cold-looking woman dressed in calico, her bare arms rolled in her kitchen apron, watched them from the stoop while the horses drank and Cornish filled the canvas-covered canteens.

"Ask her," Engracia leaned from her saddle to say, "if we may use their telephone. I must send word to mamma we shall be late. We can call up the saw-mill, too, and they will tell Tom we are coming. He's so unconcerned about disappointments, he may not wait after what he would call a suitable time."

A crowd had gathered in the person of one old man, who left his woodpile and came and sat on the steps to observe them more at leisure. He chewed and spat and studied Cornish in particular — his horse, his riding-clothes, his speech as he and the girl consulted in low voices. He had recognized Engracia, by her pony, as one of the Scarths from Torresville way.

"They ain't got no telephone in there," he volunteered; the woman assented with a nod. "Where

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you want to connect?" She turned an unfriendly eye upon Cornish.

"Could you tell me where there *is* a public telephone?" he retorted in kind.

She glanced at the old man:— "Ther' ain't no telephone in Blue Tent," he answered. "Ef you want to talk to somebody, you'll have to go on to Grizzly" (Grizzly Flat).

"But we can't, this afternoon," Engracia struck in, smiling. She had heard the stories about these placer-towns, their well-founded suspicions of strangers, and thought it time to be more diplomatic. "We are going to meet my brother, Mr. Scarth, and we're off our road. We want to send him word that we shall be late —"

"Whereabouts you aimin' to meet him?" the ancient inquired.

"Dixie Cañon — where the flume crosses from this side."

"Sho, you don't have to go back them three mile! I kin put ye onto a trail — take ye there in no time. The ditch-trail: Jim Perrin uses it steady goin' to town."

Engracia mentioned, aside, that Perrin was the company's ditch-tender, and no doubt the trail would be all right. But she knew enough to ask, "Is there a bridge? how do we cross the creek?"

"Ford it, far as I know. 'Tain't much of a crick. Jim will give you your bearin's — you're right there, might say, soon as you strike his cabin."

They took the trail, Cornish indifferent, Engracia

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eager to repair her previous carelessness. The way was beautiful but steep. The voice of the north wind rose out of the gulch, making music in the tops of the tall, thin young pines into whose gray perspective of trunks they rapidly descended. Half a mile brought them to their first landmark, the ditch, and all seemed well. They stopped in a little glade clothed with sunny deer-grass to dispose of a five-minute lunch. Engracia admired her companion's gallantly forced appetite to match her own frank cravings, but he made no pretense to conversation. They rode on along the trodden ditch-bank, and very soon talking would have meant shouting — against a sudden outcry of waters that burst upon them as if a flood barred the way.

The ditch ended suddenly at the head of the flume where it strides out on its forty-foot trestle. There was no bridge and no ford a sane rider would attempt. The creek boiled along swollen by heavy rains in the mountains. They might have heard the tumult sooner but for that glorious north wind rioting in the gulch.

"He said it was n't 'much of a crick,' " — Cornish shouted: "I think Jockey of Norfolk is bought and sold!" — She could hear only "sold."

"Who did you buy that horse from — hire, I mean?"

"Ryder, his name was."

"Of course we're sold! He's the *sheriff* — of Plumas County, where they are watching these men."

"So that's why there was no telephone in Blue Tent?"



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She pointed ahead: "You see how Jim crosses" — a man's footprints in mud were plain on the eight-inch board laid along the cleats of the flume. "Now, if you could make him hear us!"

Cornish amazed her with a remarkable screech through his thumbs resurrected from a boyhood not misspent. She complimented him on it, but it failed to produce Jim. "I know he has a telephone," she urged. He remained calm. She waited a decent interval — nothing whatever occurred.

Her face flushed crimson: she slipped out of her saddle to the ground and began taking off her spurs. In an instant he was beside her. "What are you going to do?" He picked up one of the spurs and held it toward her, pointing up the trail. Nicety of speech was denied them in that uproar. It added to their mutual irritation, being obliged to explain differences on a forced key.

"We shall be hours late. Tom won't wait unless he knows we are coming. If he gets home without us, mamma will be sick!"

"We can go straight back, then, and get home first."

"And not meet Tom? — Give up the whole day! I lost the road — please let me fix it."

"Anything you say, short of walking that flume."

"I don't ask you —"

"And I don't offer."

"I saw that! If you like to be beaten, I don't. I should feel very silly —"

"But this is more than silly — to walk that flume to tell your brother —"



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"I have n't asked you to walk it. Why will you make me insult you!" His color rose — "You see Jim's tracks — walking flumes is no more than crossing Broadway —"

"— If you are used to it." He had unsnapped his spurs and kicked them off; backing Nipper out of his own way and square in hers, he was off upon the errand required of him. He had attacked it in hot blood and the high cup of his wrath upheld him for the first half of the way. He reached the highest spot and she watched him frozen. A full head of water shot beneath his feet; the creek tore and tumbled far below — very far, it seemed to him. Sun flashing on both currents confused his sight, and he had not a head for high places. She guessed that now, and could have pounded her own head upon the rocks in shame for what she had forced upon him, in a cheap demand for "gallantry," about as civilized as the laughter of squaws. It seemed to her that he stayed on that high spot forever, hesitating — then he recovered and almost strode into the bosom of the opposite shore. He did not once turn to look at her, but climbed the bank and vanished in the willows around Jim's cabin. Again it seemed hours that she waited for another sign.

He had known that he was right before, and now he had proof of it. In regard to Tom, there was no response from the sawmill, though he tried obstinately over and over. The little girl who had "dared" him to this job might wait now! As to her mother — it took time for Central to "get" Mrs. Scarth on the

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local line; it took more time for his answers to satisfy the questions he had aroused. She knew more about this region than her daughter allowed for.

"But where are you talking from?"

"Jim Perrin's cabin, I believe."

"How did you get across? — you did n't try to ford!"

"Oh, no," said Cornish easily; — "just walked the flume."

"That flume! — not Engracia?"

"She's on the other side with the horses —"

"And you crossed to speak to me! I hope my foolish girl did not send you!"

"Oh, no," lied Cornish. "I crossed to send a message to your son. We'll all be back about nine or half past."

"Well!" said Mrs. Scarth's voice expressively; "I shall be glad to see you! I wish I knew you were safe back across that flume."

Cornish wished so, too.

He was on the bank — his second ordeal before him. Doing a thing once does not necessarily make it easier to do it again. Cold sweat broke out upon him; the foundations of his being literally revolted in face of the attempt. Engracia knew his peril almost better than he, as he took his first steps along the plank in no such form as he had exhibited before — it was cold blood now. He walked with fatal rigidity and he was looking down. She saw him falter miserably, creep on a few steps, then slowly lower himself and cling on all fours to the plank. Her soul was

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sick for the humiliation, and the shock of the danger before her eyes drove her out upon the flume to meet him.

How she got there she did not know, but they were together and he rose, deathly white, with the help of her hands, and so they stood confronted.

"Hold on to me while I turn," she said, trembling. It was an inspiration. He forgot himself, he supported her. She changed feet on the narrow board and faced the other way. "Now, put your hands on my shoulders and *don't look down!*"

"Break step?" he asked faintishly, thinking of wire bridges in the air.

· "Keep step, and don't look down!"

The tranquil shore came nearer above her little head, and when they stood on the good ground once more, she sank a dead weight suddenly on his breast. How long he held her or how she came to be seated on the ground with him beside her, he did not know.

"Please go away," she said, "I want to cry."

"Then cry here." He wanted to cry, too, if truth were known. Decidedly he wanted to do other things equally preposterous, if not equally unmanly.



## PART III





## CHAPTER XX

CORNISH left them in three days and no more was heard from him officially, but letters to Engracia began to come, which necessitated explanations to one's mother. Caroline was astounded at the size, vulgarly speaking, of her little daughter's first "bag." It silenced one side — the cheaper — of the old contention, and it disposed of that other fear lest her odd child, sweet as she seemed in a mother's eyes, might miss that human form of appreciation prized by the human mother as being "respectit like the lave."

Cousin Anna came up just then on a short visit, thinking how sad it would be at Roadside, and showing that she expected it to be sad. It was merely common consideration, in the long talks between the friends, to speak of something besides dolor — and the episode of one's daughter's perfectly up-to-date conquest slipped from Caroline's keeping (perhaps she did n't try very hard to keep it) — strictly in confidence, of course. Her punishment held off for a while. Meantime it was novel and pleasant to taste that triumph over again in her friend's astonishment and frank regrets.

"I hope she has n't put an end to it finally: no girl, at her age, can possibly know what she wants in a husband."

"She expects to be convinced, however. He seems

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to have failed to convince her that he is what she wants."

"For the present: he won't give it up, of course. But she must n't keep him waiting too long. I am sure there's many a charming woman in New York would take him quick enough; and *he* has no time to throw away."

The steady rains came on. The oak kept his leaves and darkened the downstairs rooms as of old when it was the children who were missed as the autumn days grew shorter. The women sat by the fire upstairs and said, in their patchwork language of quotes, "'Now for retrospection and the fall sewing.'" Caroline had dug this up out of a past when women did have "fall sewing" and spent happy hours over it with long talks, or reading aloud therewith: reading aloud being the best part of education in those days, and a better guide to thought, in most cases, than club meetings, for you don't usually meet and talk intimately with the greatest minds and souls of the ages at modern club gatherings. And, of course, whole afternoons given to bridge or tea-dances, to women of Caroline's bringing-up, would have appeared "an occupation for bedlam."

They did not pride themselves upon their resources, nor even upon the singular blessedness of being forced to discover and depend on them. Caroline said honestly, "It is very dangerous to be so happy when we are all by ourselves. You must n't give way to it if I do; you ought to need people and you ought to get used to *more* people."

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“Don’t bother me. I’m going away to get used to people ; I shall need one person and she won’t be there. — And oh, mamsy, I’m such a baby about it all — this place and all of it!”

“But there is nothing special about this place. We have our sunsets ; — there are better ones down at the Bay.”

“And houses in front of them ! — hideous houses !”

“Yes ; it’s very bad to stick to one place or one set of associations too long. It makes one narrow and sensitive and afraid — and even suspicious that there must be something wrong about every other place. You can see it in me !”

“If you were like your own theories, mamma, — the ones you try to work off on your children, — nobody could live with you. Thank Heaven, you’re not ; and you know it as well as I do.”

There had been a letter from Cousin Anna — apropos of changes — asking Engracia to “come down” and taste their life and society in town for a while. Unquestionably the thing to do ; but Engracia, in proof of her mother’s words, arose with groans and looked over her clothes with reference to worldly eyes upon her. However, a mother can sometimes be lenient. “Cousin Anna will see to you perhaps, when you get down there ; and you won’t be going out.”

Engracia had been at the Ludwells’ some days. Dressed as usual rather early one evening, she stopped in Clare’s room for a few last fastenings. Clare fixed a lively eye upon her.

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"Guess who's coming to dinner to-night?"

"Dalby Morton generally is coming to dinner: is to-night an exception?" Engracia countered, suspecting a trap of some kind.

"Dalby won't be in the picture with this man. He's an authority of some kind upon something—I don't know what! But you know him: you had him up there weeks examining you. Now, can't you guess?"

There was no difficulty in seeing that Engracia guessed. Seldom had she risen to a clumsy cast like this. A slow, stubborn blush took command of her countenance, refuting any possible pretense of indifference. The subject dropped like something hot between them, — Clare as much amazed as Engracia was furious.

Clare, be it said, did not sleep that night till she had wormed out of her mother the secret confided by her friend with such artless satisfaction. It was out of Mrs. Ludwell's power to lie directly, which her daughter knew, and framed her questions accordingly. And what she had won by her own ingenuity, Clare made use of as she pleased: — and what harm in letting it be known that one's little country cousin was not quite so negligible socially as she might appear. Men, Clare considered, were fair game, especially men on the confines of forty; if they have not learned by that time to take care of their tender feelings, who do they expect will save them?

At dinner neither candles nor flowers obstructed Engracia's view of the evening's guest at his hostess's

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right, nor the occasional disconcerting glances she could not avoid from his direction. Disconcerting, because Clare was merrily on the watch; and he had shaved his Edward the Seventh beard, which took at least ten years from his age and restored to the uses of expression a mouth and chin not ill adapted for the purpose. She saw him for the first time in society, guarded and ready as a diplomat, clever in his talk, but not artificial. It was also their own first formal meeting under other than family eyes; it held the consciousness of justifiable secrecy shared with dignity on both sides, but as Engracia was unused to such implications it disturbed her poise.

Other guests enlarged the party after dinner. Quite in the end of the evening, he came deliberately to speak to her where she had settled herself with a book in an excellent window-seat. He wheeled his chair so that seated he could screen her from the room. It was half a minute before he broke a silence interesting but anxious for both.

"Reading in company? Were n't little girls spoken to for that? — little boys were, in my time."

Engracia put down her book, smiling. "I stop with pleasure."

He glanced at the title and disposed of it with a shrug: "Unwholesome, decadent."

"Ah, but a poet!"

"We don't need them — that school. They are sick or insane; their work will not last."

"I should think this might last — as long as it was meant to. It does n't believe that anything lasts."



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She passed him the book open — He read, with an unsympathetic eye :—

“They are not long, the weeping and the laughter,  
Love and desire and hate:  
I think they have no portion in us after  
We pass the gate.”

“Not for me! I’m too near the ‘gate.’ Only children like you can abide that stuff. But I came to talk business, not poetry.”

“Business? — with me!”

“Your business, mistaken child,” he looked at her gloomily. — “Earning your living.”

“How did you know?”

“Your mother was kind enough to tell me.” (“Mamma must be losing her mind,” thought Engracia. “She certainly is a little warped this summer of our woes.”) “I hope she didn’t see how it distressed me,” Cornish added: “I fancied she was not any too happy in it herself.”

“Mamma is away behind the times in some things; and she can’t believe I am grown up. She thinks bears will eat me.”

“They will — but, of course, you won’t listen to me; though I was a brother once and might speak for brothers a little.” He paused, but she remained silent. “I seem to have lost ground in ‘the treacherous air of absence’?”

“No, indeed, only — to be frank — and personal — I scarcely know you. You are changed. I should n’t say it was ‘absence’ alone —”

He touched his shaven cheek and looked at her



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unsmiling. — Would you prefer, on the whole, to see less of me? We try these experiments on our wretched countenances as you do your hair suddenly in some new way. Be thankful it does n't grow on your faces.

There was no occasion for immoderate laughter at this speech, nor even at his quaint depression as he watched her. She was liable to such nervous manifestations under his hypnotic gaze. "Oh, come," he said with a sudden deep inspiration, "you strike me as a child sporting on the edge of a precipice; I am afraid to speak for fear I shall make you fall. And I am commissioned to offer you precisely what I most dread you should have."

"Something to do? — a position?"

"Mrs. Rivington wants you for her secretary."

Engracia gasped.

"Was it your — most kind —"

"It was n't, rest assured. Why should I be kind? But I am much more than kind, remember. — You and your character and your qualifications were in my hands: I might have shut you off with a word! . . . She knows who you are and all that, but — let me say in parenthesis — don't be too sure she understands. She is preoccupied."

"I should say so! I'm the one to understand — I hope you accepted at once — if you think, that is, that I'll do?"

"I wish — once more — you would accept — something so much simpler, more natural, safer —"

"Not safer! Please, let us spare ourselves: it is useless."

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She saw him breathe deep : she had put a period to that side of their discourse, but she half wished she could have added, "useless — now."

"You will want to write to your mother first?"

"I can take her consent for granted. She has had the direst doubts, but this will lift a load off her poor mind. Will it be in the East?"

"No; Mrs. Rivington is coming to Southern California, to be near a school where she has placed her sons." Cornish paused and smiled to himself. "Her doctors have ordered complete rest for her nerves; they always believe there is such a thing!"

"As nerves?"

"Rest! So, she has set up a Ouija-board, and now she wants a companion."

"What is that other thing? — 'Wee'?"

"Merely a device for wasting time — and better than solitaire, for it wastes time for two. You will sit for hours on the other side of the little demon and listen to banal questions about things that you've no business to know, and to driveling answers from a wooden peg which points to the letters of the alphabet, on some dark principle that we are not expected to fathom."

"How you must have suffered from it — the little demon!"

"I have: but let that pass. You will be paid for your time. Could you exist, independent of brothers you despise, on a thousand a year?"

"Mr. Cornish! Does she want to buy me?"

"What a pathetic child you are," he laughed un-

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mirthfully. "I shall not mortify you by a rough guess at what Mrs. Rivington pays her cook!"

"A fig for your cooks! I shall live with the lady of my dreams and prize every hour in her company — and to be paid, beside!"

"I am to accept for you, then, without any conditions?"

"If you think she won't be disappointed. Did you tell her I have had no training to amount to anything?"

"I should not tell her that because you have — she did not ask me, however."

"I wish I might know what she did ask you?"

"She asked, first, if you were good-looking — or perhaps she said pretty; and if you had a pleasant voice, and if you dressed 'like a lady.'"

"I wonder what you said to that!"

"I think I said that I no longer professed to know how a lady should dress."

"She must have thought you were mocking her or me, or the whole arrangement."

"I mock myself of my wasted magnanimity. You don't give me the least credit for it; she naturally knows nothing about it, and if it should turn out badly, the dregs will be mine to swallow — knowing I might have kept the cup from you with a word."

"But what 'cup'? What is in it, do you imagine?"

"Heaven knows! Ask Ouija."

"What *is* 'Wee' — how do you spell it?"

"Mrs. Rivington will write you all these important particulars. One thing I must warn you: your lady

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is not athletic; she never walks: she steps — in the highest heels — from her rugs to her limousine. She will ignore your active habits.”

“You know you thought me the laziest girl in the world!”

“How did *you* know that? Well, I found out about you. Mrs. Rivington will not find out unless you tell her. Promise me you won’t forget your walks?”

“I shall leave my walks to her. Why do you try to warn me against my lady before I have even seen her! I *like* high-heeled ladies in limousines.”

“I am trying to prepare you for reality where you are looking for a dream. Limousines have their price, like other things. It is not necessary to say Mrs. Rivington is a brilliant, fascinating woman: that you will find out for yourself. — But it won’t help you to walk.”

“I will remember orders; but you know I have no nerves.”

“You will develop some when you become a companion, especially if you don’t walk. Now, I must say good-night to your very charming cousins.” Yet he seemed unable to take leave. “By the way, do you read Wordsworth’s ‘Sonnets’?”

Engracia smiled: “Not much.”

“Read them more. And when you come to a line in one of them, beginning ‘Dear Child, dear Girl,’ — I wish you’d think of another old fellow you don’t care for much who is thinking of you: — ‘God being with you when we know it not.’ — I hope so!”

“Are you quoting or talking?”

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“Both. You know, I had got over that habit of quoting, but staying in your delightful family brought it on again.” They smiled at each other appreciatively : — “Farewell,” he said.

“But why not good-bye? Shall I — don’t you — ever come to see Mrs. Rivington?”

“If I came to ‘see’ any one at Mrs. Rivington’s, who would it be?”

Engracia gave him her hand in silence. He looked deeply, warningly she thought, into her eyes. “Not Mrs. Rivington’s secretary,” she said.

“The world being with us, perhaps not. But Mrs. Rivington’s secretary will hear from me as often as she is good enough to allow. Farewell, Engracia, — *mi alma*,” he added gently.

She sat by herself awhile, puzzled, excited, half afraid but eager for this “cup” which he offered her with such dark previsionings. Was his fear for the lady, or for herself, or himself, as he pretended? Certainly he had seemed very tender of her in his pensive raillery.

## CHAPTER XXI

DALBY MORTON, it has been hinted, was a frequent if not a constant guest at the Ludwell house. We cannot better explain why so frequent than by quoting a dialogue between him and his father, meeting one afternoon at one of their mutual clubs.

"Ha! How do!—Long time since I saw you, somehow," said the latter. "Where do you keep yourself nowadays?"

"The usual places," said Dalby, waiting for his father to be seated at the table from which he had risen.

"Sit down, son. Want to talk to you for a change. What have you been doing lately? Dancing attendance on some girl?"

"The usual girl."

"Which one is it now?"

Dalby laughed softly. "You seem pretty happy," his father observed. "Anything special to make you so? I suppose you are going to settle on one, some day?"

"One —?"

"One girl. I don't expect you to pick out a wife to please me, but when you do make up your mind, see here: I want you to do this much as I say!—Call it a promise, if you like."

"Well, sir?"



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"I wish you would give me your word never to propose to one of them after dark — in evening dress. If you wake up in the morning wanting her, that's another story; but not the gas-light nonsense. Understand?"

"Well, hardly!" said Dalby, frowning.

"I guess you do," said his father. "After dinner is part of it. You drink too much; — don't say you don't, for I know you do."

"Have you ever seen me when I showed it?"

"Do I show it? I drink too much all the time, but I did n't at your age. . . . That's how the girls make fools of you, when they look good enough to eat."

"We were n't discussing the girls," Dalby intimated, turning his eyes away.

"I am," said his father. "I've been waiting to say something about a matter — seem to hear things now and then; may be something in it. No use speaking when it's too late. How about that Ludwell girl — Tom Ludwell's daughter?"

"It *is* too late to speak of her to me in that way, father: Clare and I are engaged."

Mr. Morton received the news with a few words of such energy that his son leaned across the table and said very low, with his eyes on the wrathful visage opposite, "Would you like me to leave you, father? If my happiness affects you in this way, I'd better be off out of your sight, had n't I?"

"Sit still! What do the Ludwells say about it? Are they happy?"

"Mr. Ludwell does n't call it an engagement, yet:

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that was one reason why I have n't spoken to you. In fact — he expects us to wait a year or so, under his own conditions — ”

“Sensible old boy, Tom. Sound as a dollar! And what does — how do the women take it? How do they like the idea of waiting?”

“Clare has her mother with her: they are rather more on my side.”

“Always are, the mothers! Can't rest till they see their girls as miserable as they say they are themselves.”

“Clare and I are not miserable.”

“Marry her and see! I side with Ludwell, understand.”

“Is that all you have to say to me, father? I am positively the happiest man in the city, — and she is the finest girl, in any city!”

“Too fine, too fine. Girls like that always think they must have the earth. Don't I know Tom Ludwell's pride! She'll make you trouble, son. A year from now — you'll know.”

The dinners and dances went on without pause while Engracia's visit lasted: she had her long beautiful hours in the library and evenings often alone. But on a certain grand opera night, Cousin Anna would not permit her to miss the music. There was supper after the opera, which was long, and the hall-clock struck two as the party returned. The girls could not compose their minds for bed at once; Mrs. Ludwell left them talking by the drawing-room fire and joined

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her husband in his study. They were soon in the midst of a family argument most unexpectedly to both. If Ludwell had had the faintest suspicion how his wife would take it he would not have sprung the matter on her just at bedtime, in that casual fashion. He had merely wished her to know that Cornish, one of the strongest of the younger men in Eastern finance, had asked her husband's opinion before trusting his own as to the future of the Torres Tract developed on Scarth's plans.

"As a friend of both sides, I found it a rather delicate question."

"I should think so," said his wife in a tone that might have warned him.

"There was no getting around it; and in fact why should I hesitate? Hal Scarth never asked odds of any one's opinion — he wanted the scheme judged on its merits."

"And he is dead! — You told him you did n't believe in it?"

"I was obliged to tell him what I think —"

"One can do that, of course, without being entirely fair. Can two men, so different, judge each other's work?"

"Cornish came to me for that very reason; he wanted a different angle of vision. He knows Scarth's side — has watched it for years; and, I may add, he trusted my fairness."

"I trust your intention to be fair, Tom; only it seems to me unfortunate that you said anything at all."

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"Why?"

"For family reasons."

"There was no business or family confidence betrayed: why did Cornish come to me? He does n't do awkward things in private, any more than I do."

"He came to you to give the poor things a last chance: if you, a relative and an old friend, had not a word to say for them — of course that ends it."

"Them! we are talking of the property —"

"You know what I mean."

"Hanged if I do! — you look at the personal side."

"I should think there might have been a personal side for you — enough, at least, to keep you silent."

"I was passive. He put it to me as an old Californian, acquainted with the interlocking interests a scheme like this would have to fight —"

"Including some of your own?"

"Well, Anna, if you take that tone we simply can't talk of it — accusation is n't argument. At least, let me assure you, Cornish had about reached his own decision on the evidence he has gathered for himself, right on the spot before his eyes."

"Tom, did he say so?"

"Naturally not. He says nothing, outside of his report: he won't report to me. But you can read a man's mind — he would have liked to have his judgment shaken, I grant you that — for the same reason it went hard with me to confirm it."

"So you did! — You will have helped to turn them out of their home?"

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"There you are again — a woman's justice ! Would you want a home founded on dead capital of investors waiting for their money ? I should call it a sad kind of a home."

"And now, what will happen?" Anna persisted, mollified without being quite ready to own it, and glad, as a wife, to hear her husband's defense.

"Nothing very soon. If Cornish reports unfavorably, the stock will be gotten rid of — probaby in one lump. The other stockholders will hardly hold on after that. The Tract will be on the market — cheap — for a song."

"It is very painful, and I wish you had kept out of it."

"No one but you, my dear, will ever know it was put up to me. And I am willing to give my opinion because capital has been exploited out here enough : it hurts us with Eastern investors. Hal Scarth, if he could have heard every word I said, would have called it — "

"Who is that ?" cried Mrs. Ludwell, stepping to the door. "Is n't that Dalby Morton's voice ?"

A cab had driven up and left a late caller, who was being shown into the drawing-room after what seemed some inexplicable delay and with considerable talking in one voice, a man's.

Mr. Ludwell glanced at the clock. "Dalby is at a stag-dinner ; they would n't break up at this hour."

"He 's broken up ; and he ought n't to come here — listen !" Dalby's voice, in a high wavering falsetto, went on and on ; the girls were silent. Husband

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and wife exchanged glances. "Tom, you 'd better go out there."

"You go and send the girls to bed ; I 'll take care of Dalby."

Engracia came out into the hall and saw Cousin Anna in the study door, her evening wrap falling from her shoulders. The girl looked rather confused and smiled oddly.

"I 'm going to bed after all, cousin ; — it was a beautiful time. Thank you so much."

Hardly had she reached the stair-head when Clare flew out, wildly explicit in her anger. — "Papa, I wish you would tell Dalby Morton to go home and make him understand, if you can, that I don't want to see him here again — ever !"

Mrs. Ludwell, who knew exactly what had happened, asked mechanically, "What is the matter with Dalby ?"

"Go and look at him," said Clare. "Engracia went to bed to spare me ; — do you think I can stand that !"

"You go to bed yourself ; the world has n't come to an end," said her father.

"Dalby Morton has come to an end, for me," said the furious girl. "I sat there and listened to his maudlin speeches before Engracia : he is a fool !"

Clare and her mother talked it over more quietly in Clare's room. Anna Ludwell thought of the other mother, her son cast off for such a reason. Poor Mrs. Morton, a most unhappy woman, would hold Clare



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deeply to blame if she threw him over now ; — it was the first slip in a long period of distinct effort and gain in every way for Dalby, under the present stimulus of joy and triumph : little Clare had not been easy to win. Who were all these boys to marry, brought up to the same habits ? “ If we had had a son,” thought Anna, “ he might have been like Dalby ” — and some proud and hasty girl might have lost patience with him just at the turning-point.

“ You must not write to-night, Clare ; sleep on it, my child. It may look differently in the morning.”

“ I will not write, mother, but I shall not sleep. — Not that I care so dreadfully. If he is like that, I don’t want him.”

“ You knew he was like that ; your father warned you. Yesterday you cared for him, knowing it ; — the only difference is, you have seen it. I don’t defend *it* ; I defend him, because he would have a right to say you knew the fact before you loved him.”

“ I don’t love him ; I am ashamed of him — that finishes love.”

Mrs. Ludwell sighed. “ He ’s no different from the others — in this respect ; a good deal better in some others.”

“ I don’t want any of them ! ”

“ The very same thing — if I must say it — might have parted me from your father once. But we cared for each other and I had faith.”

“ Father is a strong man ; he is all kinds of a man. Dalby is nothing, so far as I make him out. And he

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is ten years older than me. Does he never expect to grow up?"

"He was growing — when this folly tripped him."

"Why can't he have done with his folly? How would he like it if I kept on having proposals? — they are just as exciting to me. Mother, you must be mad if you ask me to take him back!"

"I ask! Do you think I wanted Dalby Morton for you? It was the bitterest disappointment of my life when I found that you cared for him. His mother and I cried over you both; I did n't tell her why I cried, but she knew. She owned he was not worthy; I said, 'We'll make him worthy.' Discard him if you must, but be sure it is not your own pride that does it. If any other girl but Engracia had seen him — any girl who knows the men of that set! You saw him with her eyes — the eyes of a Puritan."

"You are a Puritan, mamma — at heart?"

"I have had to be something broader, darling, and it has n't hurt me. But this is your own decision; I must leave you to think it out for yourself."

"Good-night, mother dear — what a bad time mothers do have! I will show you my letter; — it will be as gentle as I can make it, but it must be final."

"You stake your life on pride, then?" ("I know she loves him," the mother thought.)

"Before I am married, yes," said Clare.

". . . Of course she's right," said Clare's father. "I should have given Dalby a year's rope to hang himself. He's done it sooner than I thought — so

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much the better. Every day of this silly affair was a day wasted for her."

"And yet I know that she cares for him. The world is very cruel to our girls. We give them ideals, but how can they keep them? You should have heard me falsifying my own ideals for the sake of a little mercy to another woman's son—and because I am afraid she won't forget him. It's such a dreadful puzzle. Dalby is—what he has to be. Look at his weak, sweet mother and his coarse-grained father, who roots everything out of his path and then grovels in it."

"Anna, my dear; you are not yourself to-night."

"Do you wonder? I was not proud of Dalby, but I am fond of him, and I would not have hurt his mother so for worlds. We must give her, I suppose, the first real light she has ever had upon her son. Mothers deceive themselves as long as they can."

"Not wise mothers."

"It's wretched and it's grotesque. I shall have to listen to his excuses to-morrow, poor boy —"

"Excuses! Accidents of that kind are not discussed with ladies. Simply mark him off your list of men you invite except on formal occasions — I'll see that he does n't come."

Anna, knowing something of her husband's bachelor past and aware of the indulgent joking that goes on among men, marveled at his hardness now. She took it as one of nature's safeguards. A man no longer jests when his own grandchildren may be heirs to the pity that follows a few generations of such

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mirth. Old Judge Ludwell carried his cups and filled them high in his youth, which was the city's youth — he carried them gallantly to his grave. Thomas Ludwell — always skipping his father, who carried nothing, either in weight or balance, that was noteworthy — filled his glass not so high nor quite so often : he was still lord of his inclinations. His daughter — and well, perhaps, that she was a daughter — took her fine nervous organization from her mother, and her excitements in a different way. She had gone through her first season with that vigor and elasticity which is the marvel of strong men in these light-clad slips of girls. But turn the screw once more in the next generation, add the risks on the Ludwell side to the certainties on the Morton side — what father who knew the world would tamper with that equation?

Dalby's card was sent up next day, an appeal which Clare hotly ignored. He walked about the bright, still room trying to realize that this might be his last waiting there, watching the door for a sight of Clare's particularly lovely and buoyant way of entering to greet a guest. Near him stood the piano, and open on the rack where she had left it yesterday was the last song she would ever sing with him beside her on the music-bench : — only yesterday at this hour they sat so and at the song's close she had let her head sink back for his rapturous kiss. It was a song called "Youth" from Harold Simpson's "Cycle of Life." ("Oh, love, oh, love, we will wait no more!") He heard the soaring crescendo in Clare's entrancing tones. They thought that they knew all there is

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to know of youth and love and the triumph which disdains waiting. — And here came Clare's mother entering, alone.

His practiced manner was gone ; his face flushed and his eyes sank under her cold, gentle look. He raised her hand to his lips, quaintly but with genuine feeling that she could not slight. She smiled as usual, but there was no hope for him in her smile.

"You will plead for me, Mrs. Ludwell? — Ask her to give me one more chance. It was not an accident ; I should call that inexcusable ! It was a trick — played on me by the man I took a taxi home with — an asinine joke. We were both pretty much the same, but I was dozing when he got out, and he gave the driver this address — he's written his apologies. It looked funny to him last night. — I thought I was at the club, on my word, I did, when I blundered in here."

Mrs. Ludwell grew more patient and more frozen. "Well, Dalby, you broke your word last night for the sake of a custom you poor boys can't seem to get rid of: it's time the girls began to help you. I don't suppose it is often an engagement has been broken in this city on account of a bachelor supper, but I am glad that Clare has had the courage to set an example."

"But to end it all overnight — throw me off with *that* for the last word ! What becomes of all that was true here yesterday? — in this room? A man's slips are not the man."

"His want of self-control is the man — or the boy.



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Clare is too much of a child herself to marry another child." She rose: "I shall not take her your apology, Dalby: it's as unpresentable — as you were, yourself, last night. We women live by our power of seeing the souls of the men we love, but we can't keep that power if you insist on destroying it. You and Clare know nothing about that as yet. There is a want of seriousness on both sides. Dalby! for your own sake, show us that you can be a good loser: it's been nothing but a game so far. Say that we are unfair, if you like, — I don't expect to let you come here any more, — but do let us see that this humiliation has cut deep enough to do some good."

Dalby kissed her hand again very gently and took his dismissal.

"It is," she owned, "a wretched reason for parting two happy young persons, but, remember, I am afraid for Clare, too. She was too angry last night to be just, and I think there was hurt vanity mixed with her tears. I shall not spare her! You neither of you know in the least what love is, and it would be unsafe for you to learn on each other. I am rather sorry for the one you will learn on — if you understand me?"

Clare's winter went off in a round of triumphs. If she had a trouble, she danced it down under her slender, tireless feet; she was said to have had a wonderful success. Nothing actually was known, though much was repeated and taken for granted, as to the breach between her and Dalby. He went



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South, on business, it was said, for his father. The Ludwell servants began to ask their friends about situations that might be open after Lent. The family were closing up the house and going abroad for the summer. Mrs. Ludwell made interest in behalf of her deserving ones; in this way, a young housemaid from Canada, who longed for the country, was placed at Roadside where there was a huge vacancy now. Moon had gone back to China to do a son's duty by an aged mother who was blind. "She die pretty soon," he said calmly. "I come back then."

## CHAPTER XXII

SCARTH had never for a moment entertained the idea of presenting his great mining and agricultural project to Tom Ludwell for sympathy. He had known to a humorous certainty how the capitalist cousin would see it. He would praise the engineer's imagination, admire his historical precedents, scoff at his cost-sheets, and treat the whole as oratory, about as valuable as a graduating thesis.

But while Cornish had been laying it out before him in terse business language, doing his best with the dream of the dead who die with their work unfinished (Cornish had imagination too), a point here and there lodged in the brain of that other dreamer who dreamed in high-per-cents tending toward the pockets of Thomas Ludwell and his friends.

For a number of years he had been matching the pieces of a combine — never consciously casting eyes on his cousin's scheme; yet the Torres Tract would fit beautifully into his own puzzle waiting to be closed up. He could have sworn on his conscience that when Cornish asked him, man to man, for his counsel, he had been as honest with the dead as with the living. An investor, he spoke for other investors, for a woman, the guardian of her children's rights — left as his own girls might be. That was all about *that*: Anna could say what she liked! But a touch of sore-

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ness as to what she had said made him careful not to mention a later step which he had taken in reference to that old stale bait for capital, the Torres Tract.

Hopeless as it looked now, — when it became wreckage, flat on the market, it might well be worth his while to pick it up. Not every one could do with it what he could. His own purpose would rather steam-roller the Scarth and Rivington epoch, but only as a commercial follows the romantic period in the life of a community or a nation or a man. We all come to it at last, he argued — the question, Will it pay — and when and whom? What “show” are we to have in the prophetic future?

In due time it seeped out, through one of those untrustworthy channels which all schemes are provided with, that Ludwell and his friends were lying in wait for the Rivington stock in valley lands called the Torres Tract — not buying in their own names. That was common enough; when Cornish learned it, he may have smiled (not being so close to Mr. Ludwell's conscience as its owner) recalling the disinterested cousin's advice that day when it had seemed to hurt him to give it. As to the information, he was neither excited nor surprised. He made prompt use of it, however. In one of those long thick letters which went up on Mrs. Rivington's tray at her breakfast-hour (which she answered herself), he apprised her of this powerful purchaser in ambush. “I recommend that we hold off awhile; we'll try a policy of inactivity. In regard to young Scarth's salary — a waiting salary is not supposed to rank as a

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working one. Suppose we split the difference and call it —” But it is hardly fair to betray what Tom was asked to stay on. It was a just salary enough in proportion to the poor old tract’s revenues. Cornish had his own conscience of a trustee, and his first duty was to those who constituted his chief responsibility.

Cousin Tom made ready his affairs for the journey abroad in the best of spirits; thankful to be rid of Clare’s foolish entanglement with Dalby; seeing his way clear at last to the finish of his old and waiting scheme up-country among the water-rights that would mean millions one day; proud of the girls he was taking with him in all the public places of the world. He thought there were no two like them. Anna, though he deceived her a little when it was best for her comfort, he loved for that quality which made it necessary to deceive her: her woman’s weakness for the losing side endeared her to his imagination and his heart; but in business the loser must go to the wall. He did not make this world’s laws. His aim was to make it a fair and goodly heritage to those whom he loved, a kind world to his friends and a proud world for himself in the eyes of other men his peers. Those who noted his success, and especially those who compared it with their own un-success, usually called it “Ludwell’s Luck.”

## CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. RIVINGTON had not suited herself with a house in close proximity to her sons' school; the headmaster, moreover, hinted polite doubts as to the advisability in some cases of a mother's hovering so near. She heard of Roberta Sands's big house in a lovely region, open to tenants (of sorts) for three months, and took it after the briefest consideration — which was the lady's way.

Roberta had no sentiment about houses, especially ugly ones, nor had she any objection to turning a penny in rents while she spent thousands for any caprice that crossed her on her wanderings. It was a big penny Mrs. Rivington paid, but she knew about heiresses.

"Overleap" has the perfect altitude, on this coast, of two thousand feet above the sea; the fogs are below it and the snows on its distant mountain-tops never come down. Softness and chill sweeten the long months of sunshine. It is cool enough for roses and rhododendrons and hollies, and its banks and beds and hedges of these are the head gardener's pride. But too many seasons their glory passed unseen: the young mistress would be away, dreaming of epics in gardens, among Old-World vistas and fountained terraces and water-stairs and century-old avenues. She knew that such gardens as these are not made even

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with money on a rush order as Americans love to do things. She had high and vain imaginings in many directions: it was Roberta's disillusionment and mocking satiety which made her fascinating. She was weary of most things that were hers and not yet prepared for some of the compromises which are the price of what she really did want — a home and children of her own.

The house faces a deep valley and is backed by noble, wooded hills — “the old red hills” covered with immense trees fed by sea-fogs which sweep inland in winter. Of its architecture the less said the better. The hearts were glad that built it; they had not learned the pride of discontent. Listening to Roberta's bored apologies for its general mistakenness, Anna Ludwell keenly remarked to her spouse, “Let us be wise in time: we will wait till Clare grows up before we build our country-house, or she may be apologizing for us.”

But the grounds are laid out with breadth and some lovely features, like the lily-pool at the end of a long walk between ranks of cypresses, where the afternoon shadows lie as still as on the pavement of a church. A mass of flickering bamboo catches the sunlight again beyond this dark pearl of water — relieved upon a rich tapestry of oaks and pines and firs, and glistening madroños to lighten the splendid wall.

On the hills, mushrooms grow in the month of February — Engracia's second month of luxurious slavery. We are most of us slaves to one thing or another: Engracia had the satisfaction that she had



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chosen her own form of bondage—tasks without regularity or system done at the impulse of a lady whose moods she did not understand, but whose person she admired and whose company excited and tired her. The walks she had promised to take she literally stole, or she rose early with the excuse of mushrooms and came home breakfastless and quite weak with hunger. It was necessary to rise early, because small and some large neighbors got up and had the fairy crop all picked before a servant was awake in the big house, and sold Overleap its own mushrooms at its own kitchen door.

This morning she had sent her basket in to the cook, gently hinting to the pleasant young waitress who took it that breakfast would be welcome when it came. Feeling very gaunt, she sat down to sort last night's mail just fetched from the village. Laying aside Mrs. Rivington's personal letters to go up on her tray, she stacked the business ones, and, with a breath of quickened interest, took up her own ewe lamb, an envelope in that hand which she had once mistaken for Mrs. Rivington's—how different! Breakfast called her and she read as she ate, satisfying a double hunger.

At home she had been the center of her mother's existence; she had been "faulted" sometimes, but only in trifles and because she was so watched and standardized. Tom, with his silent smile, had been ever reassuring, in a general way. She missed these dear presences constantly. But there was another hunger that she had lately, to her uneasiness, begun

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to develop — which fed upon letters in this peculiar hand. It was a hand that satisfied the eye, to start with: close-knit, muscular; — it looked illegible till you were used to its decided mannerisms. Cornish had that stripped, lucid style which men in the higher walks of business acquire that seems somehow the language of a necessary integrity. What he said you felt that he meant and probably more than he said. And though seldom directly personal (except always in one sentence to show he had not changed), his argument and contents centered wholly on herself. A dangerous diet for a homesick girl losing sight of her own identity and swamped in another's not yet so dear as to pay for the exchange.

She rushed through her letter tremulously, read it again, and sat down with a beating heart to answer it in this mood. To understand her frame of mind one must go a little deeper into Engracia's relations with her dream-lady. Nothing, of course, is so significant in the talk of two women who do not wish to quarrel as the subjects they avoid. Engracia now no longer allowed herself to be drawn into any discussion of the past, where history or memory of recent events aims to bring out some great moral purpose working out its ends through a period of suffering and national regeneration: our own Civil War being an acute instance. Mrs. Rivington, she said, held no brief for the South: she merely asserted that all wars alike sprang from prejudice, ignorance, and self-interest on both sides, whooped on by catch-words in the mouths of propagandists more or less sincere; and our great and

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hallowed conflict (though it resulted in emancipation) was no exception. Our poets might have read the Lord's righteous sentence in the waste of a whole generation of the nation's youth, might see the face of Christ in the bivouac-smoke of a "hundred circling camps," and call it dying to make men free when they walked between rows of Northern soldiers' graves — but had Engracia seen the later school histories? Such arrogant and profane injustice was not taught in these days. Engracia had small acquaintance with school histories: she had her family traditions, though, and her reading, which evidently had been along very different lines from Mrs. Rivington's, and naturally she did not renew that or any similar discussion. This was the serious side of the growing antagonism between her and the lady whom she had expected to revere. There was another side to it which made reverence, admiration, even less possible, and abolished all feminine confidences of a delicately venturesome kind. It would be easy to make too much of what led up to it, but Engracia had resolved never to be drawn into any discussion of "men" or of any particular man, or any phase of the man and maid question, with Mrs. Rivington. Her touch on that subject conveyed something which to Engracia was wholly new, indescribable, and revolting. It spoiled for her the sight of that graceful woman in her deep and most becoming weeds, dwelling, as she claimed, night and day, in thoughts of her absent little sons.

Because of this deliberate reticence, Engracia had now a confession to make involving a request, and both

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were too difficult to be postponed. Her pen traveled as fast as she could set the words down.

“I think you know that I have told mamma what happened on the road to Dixie Cañon ; I don’t mean the flume — that I never have told any one ! Parts of your letters, I confess I used to share with her ; they were too good to keep to one’s self. It was every way delightful to get them, at home, and to hear her praise them (mamma and I practically inhabit the same body) and expatiate on the men she used to know. She was even willing to admit there are men still who can write letters. We both agreed that I was greatly honored in yours — and you know I enjoyed answering them — there : but here it is different. I seem to have ‘lost countenance.’ I cannot speak of you or hear you spoken of without self-consciousness, for the simple reason that I am conscious of a side of my life in this house which I am keeping from its mistress whom I had hoped to have felt toward as a friend. It would astonish her into very natural curiosity (which I should not care to satisfy) if she came to know that I receive letters from you quite frequently, read them without mentioning them to any one and post my answers with a certain caution about their being seen. I can’t accuse myself of anything more than a desire to keep my affairs to myself, especially when they include you and your affairs. On the other hand, you are more her friend in a hundred ways than you are mine, and have been for years — I realize that now. It is impossible I should go on with this practically underhand correspondence

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with her friend, in her house. And still I cannot bring myself to be frank about it : it would end in having to be frank about you. I simply can't, and as it is probably a fault in me, I must pay the penalty and give up your delightful letters. I thought it all over this morning on the hills — wondered what I was about that I could not be happy ! It's the false position, don't you see ? Here's a letter from you this morning in the same mail with one to Mrs. Rivington, and they do not recognize each other, those letters — That means something wrong, you see ; and since it must stop, it cannot stop too soon. Will you, then, let this be the last letter, on both sides ? Your silence will be the most generous answer you can make me. No one was ever more generous in everything.

“Your most grateful

“ ENGRACIA SCARTH.”



## CHAPTER XXIV

ENGRACIA had learned now the meaning of a Ouija board and the amount of time it could waste. She had also learned to expect no concentration from her mistress: it was this that tired her more than anything else and she was very tired. So many things were started and put aside — books begun, talked about cleverly, but never finished; bills even from humble creditors were not promptly paid; reminders of all sorts pursued her that her own work was in arrears. Mrs. Rivington required a certain amount of bullying — instead she caressingly bullied Engracia.

Spring work on the Torres Tract had begun, and her home letters filled the luxurious exile with passionate restlessness. Cornish was out there now, but no message came from him in her mother's hand — if there had been the least thing to say of him in her direction, that mother, she knew, would have done it ample justice. He had taken her at her word: she must consequently forget him and live up to her own decision; only she longed for some proof that he had not quite forgotten her, that he had not misunderstood — had not found her letter crude, wanting in delicacy and poise. It began to seem, at times even to herself, that she had made a situation out of nothing. Would he go back to New York without visiting Overleap? As his letters on business never



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passed through her hands, she had no clue to his movements, and of late, she noticed, Mrs. Rivington had ceased to speak of him — half soliloquizing, as her habit had been, as if she meditated upon him as an influence in her life ; which had not struck Engracia as at all strange considering the very prominent part her husband had given him in her and her children's temporal affairs.

They were putting Ouija's occult powers, one day, to the test of mental questions.

"We can't possibly work it in collusion," said Mrs. Rivington seriously, "if we don't *collude*, even in thought. Now, it's your turn, Engracia : make a silent wish, or ask a question — we'll see if there is anything in it."

Engracia seated opposite, rested her finger-tips lightly on the board, but not touching Mrs. Rivington's. In the waiting silence she asked herself : "Will he go back without coming to see us?"

Ouija did not move for a long and patient pause ; at last, with a series of odd jerks, the point of the heart-shaped board pushed its peg toward the letters, "N—o."

"Is that what you expected?"

"I simply wanted to know — what to expect," said Engracia.

"About what? May one be curious?"

"Does n't it seem as if the questions we ask might have more real significance than Ouija's answers?"

"Which means, you don't want to tell me? I shall follow your example then!"

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Ouija appeared to have warmed to the work : Mrs. Rivington had scarcely to wait a moment for her answers. She grew interested, absorbed, and took turn after turn, holding a conversation exactly contrary to one at a telephone — the voice, so to speak, at the other end alone being heard.

“Yes,” was the answer to her first silent question ; to the second, “Yes” ; to the third, “Ten years.”

“How many years? Say that again, Ouija?” — “Ten years” the little wooden peg spelled out laboriously. Mrs. Rivington became excited : “Extraordinary !” she cried. To her fourth and last question the answer came, “In love.”

“Well !” she gasped — “that’s plain enough !”

“Too plain, I should think,” said Engracia, haughtily, “if it’s supposed to mean anything.”

That it meant much to her companion was evident. She rose from the board and began walking about the room aimlessly : “Now I must think !”

Engracia asked, to change a subject which grew oppressive, — “Would n’t it be nice to take some dictating out of doors? I could make my copies early to-morrow morning — gain a lot of time.”

Mrs. Rivington looked at her with vacant eyes. “Go out yourself if you want to, child. You can’t imagine what has happened to me !”

Engracia had witnessed before in her mistress these fits of highly dramatized feeling about the merest trifles : they came as the climax to restlessness alternating with torpid brooding. She endeavored to attribute such moods to grief working out-

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ward as she had seen in her mother's case, through pains of adjustment often difficult for another to follow. It was so difficult here that she doubted this was grief, or all of it grief. Her mistress was open and friendly, and always she meant to be kind, but like other ladies of acknowledged charm she relied on her gracious days to make up for days when it was easier to be irritable and a trifle inconsiderate, even cross. This again might be another symptom of the nervous disarrangement she was in retreat to cure. But her curiosity about the future — not the future life, but her own life — puzzled Engracia. Her eager questions might have concerned her little sons — the answers scarcely bore out that conjecture.

Engracia went out and took a hurried walk before tea. She was very warm, and as she rushed along she arraigned herself still more hotly for these and other sins of thought against her lady. "I came like a fool expecting to adore her — she does not pay me for that. She pays me well — a great deal more than I am worth. She treats me superbly: my room is sweet! her servants are my servants; she never condescends — except when she calls me 'child': she is n't a motherly person; but I ought to take her more simply. She makes me her friend — though she takes liberties without waiting till we are friends."

The particular liberty that rankled was playful cross-examinations on the subject of lovers: "Don't tell me you've never been made love to! It always shows in a girl's manner if she has refused her man. A certain satisfied, knowing air when the poor things

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are mentioned, even if she is wise enough to say nothing. Perhaps you refused him before you were quite aware of your own mind?" — whereupon Engracia had blushed maddeningly, repeating the exasperating scene with Clare. But Mrs. Rivington was not one's Cousin Clare, nor a girl, herself! Nor had she the right to assail even in jest the privacy of a dependent under her roof. On days like the present, when some fresh irritation had come up, all former charges broke into the accusation.

Her own case, Engracia took in hand without mercy. "I am a child on a woman's errand. She needs a business woman to look after her: I am as unsystematic as she is. My typing is atrocious: I left out a whole page of that important letter I copied last week for him; he had to write for it. (There had not been one word to show that he had realized it was to her he was writing!) — As for Ouija, if *she* is obsessed, what about me? Did n't I put up my prayer like another fool? (But I am not a widow and a mother.) And who am I to judge her! If I were a nice old lady in a cap, with no wishes of my own, I'd feel pity for her. I am too used to being the center of everything myself. — And here I am keeping her waiting for her tea! A nice nurse I'd make!"

"My dear child, I forgot all about you," Mrs. Rivington exclaimed as Engracia entered. "I must have drunk my tea in a trance. Ring for Parker — there were piles of things to eat. What will you have?"

"I'll just get a glass of water," said Engracia. "I

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truly never think of tea unless it happens to be around." She took a sandwich from the tray left for her in the dining-room, ate it in haste and returned to find Mrs. Rivington in the same unconscious attitude seated in a deep, low chair, her white arms in thin black sleeves stretched straight before her, expressionless eyes fixed on the Sands' ancestors, agreeably blackened by age, paneled on the walls.

"Did I ever tell you what my age was when I married?"

"I suppose you must have been almost a child," Engracia answered as expected. She patted her warm hands with her handkerchief — Parker had not left napkins.

"I should have been a child, to any man: to Mr. Rivington I was a child unborn! Such a difference in age, you know, is fatal." She shook her head; a silence followed. "The result, with me, was arrested development: motherhood took the place of wifehood, in the fullest sense." Her audience meditated on the little absent boys whose mother occasionally forgot to write them her weekly letter of obligation — forgot that she had forgotten till their own artless letters reminded her. "There is a new doctrine nowadays that children should be the whole thing in marriage: it's blasphemy. Yet piles of women tell you it is so with them. I simply set them down as liars, or parts of women, or unfortunates like myself: I made one of those sexless marriages and I put it through upheld by my children. Mr. Rivington married me for what I could be to him, not what he could be to



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me. He wanted children — his first wife was childless, did you know? — I gave him beautiful strong sons. I lived up to my side of the contract — It is ended, but what next! As a woman I am as young as you are, Engracia." Engracia had taken a chair, restraining the impulse to flight, to unsympathetic interruptions, being fresh from that hour of penitent self-reckoning. Many women she supposed were like this; it was what her mother meant by getting used to people — "more people."

"Something is taking hold of me these days," Mrs. Rivington went on, eagerly self absorbed. — "Oh, I have much to think about! You must have seen how my mind wanders? I am two women all the time. I want you to let me talk to you: I want your narrow, *ingénue* point of view, for I am tempted to do a dangerous thing. If you, with your fresh eye, see it as I do — brooding over it hours and hours, then perhaps it is not impossible."

"I would so much rather —" Engracia began; she was motioned to silence.

"Ouija's answers this afternoon were simply hair-raising! I asked — exactly what my heart is bursting to know. Well; I am answered! You could n't have guessed my questions — you could n't have answered them if you had. As for my mind doing it unconsciously, you would have felt my fingers on the board. I swear I did not use a muscle!"

"Don't you think it might be dangerous to take a toy like that in earnest?"

"If we toy with dangerous things, they may take



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us in earnest: it is too late for that question. What I am proposing to do might succeed at first, and afterwards lead to fatal reactions. On the other hand, I am in the power of a nature fed up with every sort of energy — hampered by tremendous self-control. A man who has been fixed for years in an iron groove; he has grown hard and stiff; any hope he indulged would be a bitter hope — he would call it delusion. It might die for want of a breath of air. And if nothing came to save it, he — he and I — might lose what we have waited for long, wretched years! I am speaking of Gifford Cornish.”

There was no break in the mad recital; but had there been, Engracia could not have spoken — she must sit still and continue to hear about this sexless marriage. The words went on and on, smothering her with a sense of unaired passion, tainted friendship, and morbidness, where he, at least, had seemed so clean and sad and sane. Fragments of his remembered speeches came back to sicken her: “Engracia, my soul” — “‘God being with you when we know it not’” — could he be that monstrous hypocrite? It was unbelievable, yet she believed, because the woman who talked believed — and she sat there, and they were not mad.

“I tell you his name — I have to: a story like this sinks or swims according to the persons who are in it. You don’t know him, but you can’t have mistaken the sort he is.

“This afternoon, my first question was, ‘Is he thinking of marriage?’ — you heard the answer! — ‘To one

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he has known long?' — 'Yes' again. 'How long?' This time the answer was curiously equivocal yet true to a hair. It is just thirteen years since I promised to marry him — ten since I broke the engagement, which is when, I suppose *he* would say he began to know me. I did n't break it really — I had n't the strength: he released me. He saw I was tired of trouble and poverty, and there was no hope of change ahead. He was not anywhere near, financially, where he is now, thanks to my husband. He had a mother who was an invalid, and a sister who had married — as we proposed to — on love and nothing — and came home with nothing and a child to support. He never discussed his family, but I knew that he was the only unselfish one among them; and people call him hard!

"What I did with the freedom he gave me, you see — the remains of it! When I married his chief, there were just two choices for him — to resign his position with my husband and never see my face again, or — and he could n't afford to lose a day, with those women depending on him — submit to the ordeal I had put him to. Heavens, how he bore it! Except for Ouija's talk this afternoon, I know no more than you do — never have known — if it even was an ordeal! — whether he stopped caring for me years ago, or is eating his heart out now in silence, stubborn as he is, sooner than give me a chance to break him again. . . . The strange thing is — he undoubtedly loved my husband! So did Launcelot love his king!"

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Engracia started, but did not speak.

"They say," the other went on with her passionate soliloquy, "that you can't love any one whom you have — even your thoughts — have wronged. He would wrong no one now, if he came and took what is his. But will he come? Is it my turn to speak and let him break me! Would that be generous, or mad, or indecent?"

There was no sound from the stunned and blighted girl.

"Do say something, Engracia. How does all this strike you? I don't want made-up answers — your thoughts, just as they come!"

"I cannot have anything to do with it: you don't know what you ask!"

"Don't be afraid: experience is n't what I want — intuition. Come, answer up and answer wrong, if you must."

"If you believe Ouija, is n't that enough?"

"I suppose this is sarcasm; seriously — I do believe Ouija! She gave me a fact, but what am I to do with it? Act upon it or wait for him to act? — while we both grow old; and I know so well his bruised, secretive pride."

"That was long ago," Engracia uttered slowly, feeling her way; "are you quite sure that you have followed his life since? Men may have 'spiritual adventures,' I have heard it called."

"— Adventures with women, you mean? I know every woman he knows — or has known. He is not a woman's man: a woman he needs, but he is *difficile*.

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They angle for him — he is not pleased. No one exactly satisfies him. I did not, but I charmed him — once. Am I so changed? How do I look, candidly, to a young thing like you?"

Engracia turned away her eyes. "May I ask one question?"

"Ask anything!"

"Did Mr. Rivington know — was it part of the 'contract' — that you married him, loving some one else?"

"I did not love — Cornish, then, or I should not have forsaken him."

"You learned to love him afterwards?"

"Do you know that you hurt me, child? Are you trying to?"

"You hurt me! I believed that your husband — we all adored him — was the happiest man on earth. You have spoiled a marriage I thought was as perfect as my own mother's."

"There are no perfect marriages, and your own mother could tell you so. In her time they did not speak — they lived their little lies just the same."

"That is a lie! — and it is n't even original."

Mrs. Rivington laughed. "Now we are getting down to it! Talk to me like that and I shall know what you mean."

"You will know more than I do, then. Please leave me out of this! I have no business to hear any of it."

"That is my business! If all my most intimate friends were here, do you suppose I would ask them?"

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Take it simply, you conscientious child. We are two persons in a book, say : what should that woman do? — There is another thing I forgot to speak of : it would n't appeal to you, though. He is ambitious, and he has never worked out his own schemes with his own money in any strength. I could give him the 'sinews' and the free hand he has never had."

"Then, if you have everything to give and nothing to lose that you seem to care about, why do you talk to me?"

"Because there is something tantalizing in your silence. What scruple are you keeping back? I see that you feel this — somehow! What is it you do feel? You make me uneasy."

"Perhaps what I think is not what you really want, after all."

"Well — at least, you have seen him — later than I have : tell me how he seemed? Was he restless — as I am?"

"Not at all!"

"No ; — he would n't be! Have you ever seen a man — of his age — in love?"

"I have seen one man — of his age — when he said he was."

Mrs. Rivington barely heard. "He writes to me as if I were a woman of sixty. That's not natural! It's a pose — necessary in our present absurd relation. — I must speak and end this or I shall go mad.

"Well, my dear" — Engracia had risen determinedly : heavy heartbeats of excitement choked her speech — "you shall go. You have helped me,



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though you tried not to as hard as you could. Just putting my case in words has cleared the doubts any woman, I suppose, would have, no matter how she trusted or what reason she had to believe that she was right. I can afford to be generous and I will be, to the last degree : I shall write him to come — if he wants — what I am ready to give him. He won't come to mock me on my knees ! — Oh, these five days ! He is at Roadside — he may be here even sooner, if he telegraphs." As she advanced toward Engracia, she held out her arms, apparently in forgiveness of the girl's unresponsiveness. Engracia evaded the histrionic embrace.

In her own room she bathed and dressed in cool white and sought the spot she loved best at this tranquil hour. It was a hill facing the east ; long shadows from its wooded crest and sharp lights streamed across the fresh green meadow at her feet. She sat there till dusk fell (she meant to be late to dinner) and the birds ceased their bedtime twittering. The choreman came back driving his milked cows and left them in the night-pasture. At Roadside, they would be sitting down to dinner, Tom and Cornish and her unsuspecting mother. This made her choke. At last she could cry. The dreamy, book-fed girl had encountered life : she had not supposed it would offer, so soon, enigmatical situations to one with so little past, who had barely opened an account with the world in her own name. These were not her complications, yet they had swept her into a network of deceit — forced upon her injurious doubts and inferences in-



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sulting to the friend she had once rejoiced to own and to dream of. To see him now so altered in another's words seemed less like life than like the plot of a sterile modern drama.

## CHAPTER XXV

"HOW is one to understand that girl?" Tones and looks, which Mrs. Rivington had not fully measured in their last remarkable conversation, began to react upon her calmer mood. The only theory that seemed to cover the girl's disturbance of mind (combined with unnatural reticence) was one in keeping with her own persistent thought.

"The poor child must be in love with him herself. What a fool I am! — Of course — shut up in the same house with him — a place where they never see any one! He must have been the first clever man she had ever talked with." — She had long thought of herself, in the hid places of imagination, as Guinevere — her Launcelot had met his Elaine, the "simple heart and sweet." These being different times, that heart had not broken her — "But I was certainly unmerciful! — I must spare her now. She must be given some excuse for absence when he comes."

He did telegraph: he did not keep her waiting. She mastered her quick breath and stated to Engracia quietly: "He is coming; he will be here to-morrow."

When, a little later, Engracia awkwardly broached a plan for spending a few days in the city, Mrs. Rivington instantly met her and all was arranged — somewhat to Engracia's bewilderment. As they

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talked, it became clear to her that without any excuse or delay she and her lady must part: there was duplicity on both sides now. Mrs. Rivington's manner had altered within the hour. She was careful, solicitous — she was altogether incomprehensible. Engracia was frankly afraid of this new attitude. It doubled her own feeling of trapping and being entrapped.

"I shall take more than a suitcase," she said. "When I get as near home as San Francisco, I may go the whole way. Would it inconvenience you, if — I did not — if I should decide not to come back?"

Mrs. Rivington was singularly ready to understand. "Nothing inconveniences me. I am on the rack — I feel nothing but what I have done and what is to come of it; I am honestly better alone. You divine everything, my dear, grave, gentle Engracia."

"Dear, grave, gentle Engracia" flew with her recovered freedom to her room and began packing for home. It is not a long task to pack a wardrobe like Engracia's — she made it as long as possible; hours were before her. Luncheon waited for the mistress, who had gone on a catering quest: among other plans for her guest's welcome, she proposed to feed him. Clothes — her own — entered also into these dreams. Her maid was told to lay out everything she had with her that was "white" in her dressing-room, at four.

At half after four, Engracia went for a walk, and was scarcely out of the grounds when callers drove up to the house — early birds from the city. Mrs.

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Rivington received them with impatience, interrupted in the important consultation with her maid.

"And how have you stood it all alone, up here, all winter?" the young lady of the visiting party inquired briskly.

Her mother gave her an amused, cautioning look: widows in retreat are not asked if they are bored. Her own manner conveyed a just appreciation of the circumstances, including Mr. Rivington's extra years and the fortune he had left. She had known all about this marriage at the time. His first wife was a lady. Every one knew what this woman had married him for: even her jilting of Cornish revived in her memory, and added a certain interest to her daughter's artless but decided "break" which followed later on.

"I've not been quite alone, you know: a niece of Mrs. Ludwell's has been with me — Miss Scarth."

"Oh, Engracia Scarth! She's a cousin — awfully nice girl. Have you known her long?"

Mrs. Rivington, ignoring the question, addressed the young girl's mother, stating the nature of her arrangement with Miss Scarth and its enviable results.

"How lucky it turned out so," she replied without enthusiasm. "I should have been afraid. — So awkward when it does n't turn out, if it's any one you know."

The lively daughter thrust in again: "That's very sad, I'm afraid, for poor Mr. Cornish! You must n't make too good a secretary of Engracia, Mrs. Rivington — everybody says she ought to marry him."

"Are you speaking," said Mrs. Rivington, her

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voice regulated while her face grew slowly white, "of Gifford Cornish who was out here last fall? He's a friend of mine, too."

"Oh, then perhaps you can help it on! But it's rather fatal when girls do something and like it! I should be afraid of you, in his place."

"I would n't repeat all that talk, dear," the mother warned. "Such a lot of things are said."

"But I had it straight from Clare, mamma. And I saw them together myself at the Ludwells' one night last winter — it was a clear enough case then."

"On which side?" Mrs. Rivington asked blandly with flashing eyes.

"Oh, on his, decidedly — it's all off, though: she won't take him. Quite a score for her; — but she's very clever, they say."

"Mamma, you seem to be thinking" — a fact that apparently called for explanation. The visitors had driven a mile or so in silence, on their way home.

"I was thinking — Mrs. Rivington certainly needs a 'cure' of some kind: she was so nervous she could hardly handle the tea-things. I'm sure she dropped the sugar-tongs three times."

"Don't you think she is wonderfully handsome?"

"Well, she used to be. I thought, to-day, she looked like a ghost — a furious ghost. You said *all* the wrong things you could possibly think of; — why could n't you leave Gifford Cornish alone! She was engaged to him once — before she met Mr. Rivington."

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“But she did n’t marry him! If she got over it, why should n’t he?”

“She had her reasons for not marrying him then. There is an old saying about some girls:—‘she’ll never dance with the mate if she can dance with the captain.’ Could n’t you see how disturbed she was when you talked of his attentions to Engracia?”

“Well, I don’t care if she was! She’s had her ‘captain’; it seems rather soon to be thinking about another one.”

“It’s queer how you stumble upon things in people’s lives you’ve no business to know. Now remember not to speak of this: it’s only my impression that she was hurt by what we said. I may be quite wrong.”



## CHAPTER XXVI

THE ordeal was over. Mrs. Rivington watched her guests depart; she turned and walked the corridor rapidly, her long dress sweeping the shadows from column to column as she passed. At the end she saw Engracia standing by the cypress pool, motionless, her head bent, gazing at the water. Suddenly, as if warned that she was watched, she raised her head and looked straight into the eyes of her antagonist. A leveled pistol could not have delivered its message more frankly. She came forward—not so frightened as numbed by the sensation of seeing hate for the first time in the eyes of a human being directed at herself; she had never encountered such a look from even a dog.

“Now, will you tell me what you mean by this abominable treachery? I have just heard it as a piece of common gossip that he is your rejected lover!—And you encouraged me to send for him!”

Engracia went past her into the house and was followed and again confronted. She sat down, confused and dizzy, while a wave of throbbing weakness darkened the room before her eyes.

“First, I want it from your lips, Engracia: is it true that you refused him?”

“Yes; but I did not know it was known.”

“My God! What can I say to you?”

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"I see how it must look to you — You took me by surprise. I could not seem to stop your saying those things — Afterwards, I could only keep still. If you knew each other so intimately, how could *I* pretend to know him? As for gossip — if you think that I started it, then you will have to think so: it is a question of what you think of me. That is all I can say."

The woman leaning on the piano — where they had practiced duets together amicably, for hours together — stared at the girl lying back white and shivering in her chair. "There is one thing you can say. If you refuse to speak, I shall know this time what your silence means. Was everything at an end between you when you came here to me?"

"I had refused him; we were still friends."

"What does that mean? — Did you write to each other?"

"For a time. The letters stopped after I came — not at first —"

"Who stopped them?"

"I asked him not to write — I have n't heard from him since."

"And all this went on here in this house! You never breathed his name — you must have been sly about mailing your letters, and hidden his. My God, my God! I could easily kill you. Murder does not seem strange to me now. . . . Do you remember my saying —? But what have n't I said! I opened my whole heart to you, and you 'fooled me to the top of my bent.' . . . That you should have the power —!

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Why, I took you for pity's sake almost : I knew your mother's poverty."

"At least you can spare my mother — and my father ! But if you could listen — there is one explanation that seems possible. A man might think he would never be able to get what he wanted in this world and take up with some simple remedy — for pain he was tired of bearing. He may have tried me as a sort of anodyne. I am more bewildered than you can be : it is easy for you to believe me a traitor, but it's very hard for me to think of him as a fool — a false fool, a low-minded man not too proud to take advancement from a friend whose wife he was loving in secret all the time. If you care to know how you have hurt me — that is how."

Mrs. Rivington had seated herself, working her fingers nervously on the chair-arms. "That might be possible," she said, "if he had not asked you after I was free. He never had seen you before this summer, had he?"

"'Free' ! — you called it that — when your husband gave his life to save a little child ! If that is 'love' — you — you may have it ! I would rather die —" Tears came at last, wild, ruinous sobs that tore all disguise from the young heart agonizing at the exposure.

"Ah, now we are equals !" the other sighed. "You love him too. Now you begin to seem human. Was it some crazy notion of self-sacrifice made you hide all this? — was it for his sake — a richer woman — that sort of thing ? I could be generous to anything

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short of a cool, deliberate traitor who had played with me. — If you are hurt, too, I might try to forgive you.”

“Don’t! — I don’t want your forgiveness, or your pity. I will not be persecuted for a man I never wanted to marry, don’t want, and would not take — now — if he were the last man on earth.”

“Well, that is sufficient,” said Mrs. Rivington rising with an ominous smile. “Now we understand each other.”

## CHAPTER XXVII

AN hour had passed since Cornish arrived, punctual to his telegram, and nothing but maddening commonplaces had been exchanged between him and his guarded hostess. This was a fight for life. She was thinking: "He would be slow to open the subject, in any case; he would find it hard to begin —" After a while, suspense growing unbearable, she made a bold thrust in the dark.

"Were you able to understand my letter, Gifford, or did you simply think me mad?"

"Have you written me lately?" He smiled at her familiar extravagance in putting a matter which he took to be merely one of her states-of-mind. Her moods were so many and her concealments (from him) so few, hardly anything she could have said, short of asking him to marry her, would have surprised him much.

"You did *not* get a letter from me this week? — yesterday, it should have been — directed to Roadside?"

"Yesterday I was in San Francisco on my way here. I shall probably get it in New York. Was it important?"

She executed a swift curve, as a diver reverses who sees the bottom too near. "Important — that you should not get it! It was quite the crossest letter I

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ever wrote you. I will thank you very much to send it back to me, unread. The place for bitter words between friends is — where this shall go — in the fire.”

Cornish still smiled. “You may find on second thoughts, or third — that I deserve it yet. Why were you cross with me?”

“Why am I anything! You know how the least little thing, where I trust people, sets me back. Why, when you had put that girl under my care, could n’t you have trusted me, Gifford? You were in love with her — hoping to win her — and you were afraid to tell your oldest friend.”

He looked at her hard and steadily through the dark distressed color that burned in his face. “In the first place — I did not put her here. I was strongly opposed to her coming; but as I was not altogether satisfied with my reasons for not wishing it, I gave way — knowing that trouble would come of it.”

“How could you know that?”

“Because I know you, Lisa. — Where is she?”

Escape looked so sure and so sweet, she could afford, while pride took breath, to elaborate her scheme a little. She gave a gesture expressive of things unspeakable. “Any one might know how it would end! — two women shut up in the country alone all winter! We became astonishing friends — then we grew confidential; the inevitable topic — I hate to flatter you, but you were our only mutual man — the only one we could discuss. What can you expect, Gifford, if you will go wooing these children?



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It made your old friend wroth to hear this proper little maiden weighing her feelings—how highly she esteemed you, yet how still more highly she valued her own conscience in refusing you. I took care to let her know in a general way what you stood for in the world.”

Cornish set his teeth. “Could you tell me just what happened here, and why she has left you?”

“But nothing did happen—except, as I say, we talked about you. We had ‘words,’ if you must know. She resented my scolding her a little for what she seemed to me to be throwing away in ignorance of its worth; suddenly she wanted to go to town—that was when she heard you were coming. Then she asked if it would inconvenience me if she made it home instead, and stayed there. I could only suppose she was too homesick to bear the place any longer or was running away from you. This is what is called a ‘business relation’ between two women. You don’t seem amused?”

Cornish studied her: he was baffled. Something serious lay beneath all this hurried emphasis on trifles:—neither was she amused. Her face was ghastly pale with purple patches, her hands trembled, her laugh was shocking. He smashed through everything:—

“Lisa, I came here to take you into my confidence formally, before making Miss Scarth a second offer of marriage in your house. It was late, I own, if I had been bound, as you seem to feel I should be, to ask your sympathy as a friend. I could not have

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assumed that my private affairs were of such interest to you."

"You were very good to consider me even as a chaperon; employers are not as a rule so honored. Thank you! I am sorry the child has gone."

"May I ask for a cup of coffee early to-morrow morning — about seven? I must catch the Overland going East."

"Why don't you wait for your own train in the evening? — so much more comfortable; and we have n't half finished our talk."

"I am going back to Roadside."

She was startled, but only for an instant. "Why in the world, Gifford, don't you pick out some one there is some little chance of your winning? — you have no time to lose, my friend. Disappointments cost at our age."

Cornish said nothing: he merely watched her.

"You will hate me if I repeat her words —!"

"Then, why do you?"

"Because I care more for my friends than I do for their praise, or even their good opinion — as long as I know I deserve it — in their behalf. Her telling me was no special compliment, as it is all over San Francisco. But why permit her to wipe up the whole Coast with you! 'Quite a score for her!' — that was one little remark I had to listen to, with other comments on your defeat at the hands of youth and inexperience."

She watched him swallow the draught she had mixed: in spite of all those flavors of reckless imag-

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ination for which he was prepared, he tasted truth at the bottom. These were the dregs at last! Unwise confidences may be captured in the case of an expert like Lisa, with a young girl under her roof, but for chatter there is no hope. That which his little girl, as he called her, had said in her last letter — about telling “mamma” (it had sounded as if she were twelve years old), he refused to think of.

Lisa could go on coolly now : she saw his purpose sicken and die before her eyes. The great Cornish, whose mind for years she had sought in vain to penetrate, sat helpless, hoodwinked, sick at heart; she had him ensnared and she tied the knot which made it safe to leave him.

“Come; I may as well be hanged for an old sheep as a lamb! And if I’m to be punished, you shall take your share. These were her last words when we parted: ‘I will *not* be persecuted — “persecuted”! about a man I never wanted to marry, don’t want, and would n’t take—if he were the last man on earth.’ We have heard that statement before, but in this case I think there was a good deal of truth in it. She is a girl who certainly understands herself, if she does n’t always do justice to some other people.”

In the triumph of her inventive powers, she had exploited him to her heart’s desire. Who was humiliated now! It was a finished piece of work. There would be no visit to Roadside with revealing talks to Engracia which might have ruined all her web of fearful fancy. Cornish admitted to himself that this, too, had the unmistakable sound of a back-handed

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truth about as pleasant as those which "listeners" are supposed to hear concerning themselves. For the present it was enough:—much might happen before he crossed the continent again.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

TOM asked no questions and smiled content to see Engracia at home again ; but nothing less than the whole truth extracted by degrees would satisfy her mother. She went over everything, even to Engracia's last and strange conversation with Cornish at the Ludwells'. "What was that speech of his? — a child playing on the edge of a precipice? — But there lies the whole explanation! He was afraid to trust you with the woman : he suspected her good faith. She had a bit of his life at her mercy — which he had no reason to be ashamed of — and he knew her way of thinking and her habit of 'unstanched speech.' No, no ; you can't persuade me that a man cares for a woman or even respects her much if he can speak of her — if he can warn a young girl against her — in that way. Remember the caution about your walks! What man who loves a woman would not be confident of any one's comfort and happiness in her house. You have got this all twisted, my daughter."

"Mother — please don't get me twisted! It is no concern of mine — But the facts are, she wrote him to come ; her letter, she said, would tell him why — And he came, or was coming : I heard his telegram — They are absolutely different persons to me, now, both of them."

"Time will show," said Caroline. "If anything is

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to happen it will happen soon — and we shall hear of it.”

They heard nothing. In November a letter came from Cousin Anna in Italy. She spoke of Roberta Sands's engagement to Dalby Morton, as one mentions a piece of old news, the marriage to be in London in the spring. But about Christmas, death interposed — Mrs. Morton's “troubles were over,” as her friends put it. Dalby gave up a trip to Egypt with Roberta and a gay party, and came home to be with his father in the big gloomy house where the poor lady ended her days as she had spent them, surrounded with finished care, yet spiritually alone. Old Mr. Morton missed her in his fashion: he was restless, irascible, ill of a complication of complaints; his doctors finally sent him away to Mannheim, and Dalby kept bachelor's hall and busied himself looking after his father's affairs, not unsuccessfully it was observed. He wrote often to Roberta, letters which that clever young woman smiled at fondly as at the painstaking efforts of a child: his intellect was not the side of Dalby that appealed to her. She had quite a man's broad way of seeing some of the things young men of his type do; but on certain points she was vigilant and scornful. Dalby's own fortune in prospect put him out of the class of suitors with half an eye or more than half to her possessions, but without it, no one would ever have questioned his disinterestedness in friendship or in love.

All winter, it was remarked, he stayed faithfully “on the water-wagon” — whether for Roberta's sake



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or because of his recent chastisement, or as a tribute to the gentle shade that in those empty rooms and corridors seemed to be waiting, speechless, wherever he did not look. Sometimes he actually did look suddenly, half expecting to see his mother's face. Plainly he had settled down : he was no longer so gay and "fascinating," but he steadily won respect in quarters where he had never been taken seriously before.

Cornish spent a peculiarly busy winter. He did not write to Engracia, nor did he burn her letters ; he did nothing impulsive, but he thought of her constantly — thinking of other things meanwhile. It was at night he argued the situation over and over with a baffled sense of missing evidence. He maintained a dream companionship with her — and this at times was worse than a total breach — he talked to her alone in the lighted streets when he took his walk after dinner — on which sleep depended. He thought of her when he read books they would have liked to discuss. He learned, too, what it means to have one's trouble leap at one out of chance verses of poetry, to have the writers know about it, to meet it in the essays and stories in the magazines. He read more novels than ever in his life before and more foolish ones — This lasted all winter.

One evening of the following spring, a friend called early to ask him to join him at a new play. He was told that Mr. Cornish had just stepped out for a bit of a walk — would surely be back directly. He waited — in Cornish's library, the back parlor of a narrow

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old New York house modestly refitted for his bachelor use. A big, male volume lay open on the book-covered table. Cornish read much on irrigation, now that he could study the subject free from financial responsibilities connected with its works. That they were seductive in the extreme he could not deny. He read with curious haltings and comparisons and occasional twinges of doubt — as to a late decision of his own. The spirit of Scarth's dead dream seemed to hover over his perusal of that absorbing book. But a man has more than one side to his musings —

The visitor seated himself in Cornish's chair, back to the light and feet to the fire ; thus, in the owner's very attitude, he took up the book he had been reading, Willcox's "Egypt," and out of it into his lap fell a newspaper cutting. It appeared to be a reviewer's extract from some volume of recent verse. As he read, he smiled to himself : it struck him, from his scant knowledge of Cornish's taste, as a somewhat fervid selection, and he wondered if it might be treated as symptomatic.

"Hurt me! For your dear sake I could be driven  
With whips of scorpions and smile at fate.  
Hurt me! It greatens me — it greatens even  
The love I have that is already great.  
If you were always dear and sweet and true,  
And came to me with kisses and delight,  
How could I show the love I have for you ?

"How could that love attain its highest height ?  
Hurt me and spare not! I am yours for joy  
And yours a hundred-fold, then, for despair;  
I would not change my love for any toy — "

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Steps came down the front room and the friends greeted each other jovially; the book fell shut by its own weight. And as there is nothing in this world which can be hidden altogether nor is ever quite understood, the visitor said to himself: "That means Lisa Rivington!" — adding, "She is n't worth it — she was n't even at first-hand."



## PART IV





## CHAPTER XXIX

THE 18th of April dawned at Roadside singularly close and still. At five o'clock and some seconds, every sleeper woke to feel a strong shudder seize the upper floors as if a heavy wind had struck the house. Doors closed the night before sprung their latches and swung wide. Engracia sat up in bed and looked through her own open door into the passage — her mother stood there listening. They waited for sounds of a sudden spring gale. Nothing more occurred : it was merely a sigh that reached them from the great earth-agony down at the Bay.

Oakland and Berkeley had had their shock and were still there, though most of their chimneys were unusable. They looked across to wonder what was happening behind the flame-laced cloud that covered San Francisco. Hundreds rushed over the ferries bringing the first news which spread from the trans-bay side, and soon continental wires were clicking and every State in the Union and every city and home, with a human interest or a heart-stake on the Pacific Coast, replied in a storm of return messages, faster than the tragedy developed : — questions, demands for "copy," offers of help, prayers — from individuals — for some answer to frantic inquiries for sons, daughters, husbands in the danger zone. No one knew just what had happened (there were rumors of a tidal wave

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submerging the remains of the city) or how far it had spread. But from San Francisco, the center a few hours ago of all that forest of converging lines, — whose steep streets last night illumined the Bay far out to the warships in the harbor ; whose ladies were listening to Caruso in “Carmen” ; whose men in clubs and hotel lobbies were talking to all the world, — not a word ! A modern city had dropped back into the Middle Ages : no telephones, no traction, no plumbing, no water-pipes, no banks, no public messengers, no municipal help, and to-morrow no food. Her people were in the streets with their clothes on their backs and their possessions in their hands ; and that sound began which, it is said, still haunts the memory of those who heard it, — the shuffle of human footsteps along streets that yesterday roared with traffic on wheels, the walking and talking, for days and nights, of a houseless city watching the burning of its homes.

As the fires advanced block after block was emptied, great buildings fell in the path of destruction, blown up by dynamite ; all being done by martial law, which worked curious hardship in some cases. A man in a threatened district might remove his family and come back with a wagon, for which he had paid his last dollar in cash, to save his stuff, and find a sentry ready to shoot if he attempted to enter his own door ; he left what he had, and his household swelled the procession pushing down to the ferries or out toward the parks and the windy Presidio. The city learned another sound, in place of its familiar roar of traffic

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beginning before dawn ; this sound went on all night — the scraping of trunks towed by ropes, of tables turned upside down and used as trunks, or even bedsteads on castors hand-hauled along the miles of littered sidewalks. There were stoppages and loads abandoned by pale and red-eyed wanderers, who sat down to rest on gilded sofas dumped on the sidewalk ; or some joker farcically struck up a tune on a houseless piano covered with brick-lime. Some say there was silence those first two days — others remember a sort of Greek chorus all along the march ; but all agree there was no chorus of lamentation. An awed composure, abnormal nerve support due to the excitement of the spectacle. Life for a number of ordinary folk had suddenly risen to a great world incident of which they were a part ; they were conscious of that human brotherhood which is shared only on life's highest or lowest terms. To-morrow we shall be standing in the bread-line and so will our wash-lady and Mr. Dives, who yesterday had anything you please a year and a house worth half a million —

But the world is not so lonely as it was in the Middle Ages : there were cities of refuge across the Bay, and ferries to empty the ruins of their fleeing population, and a nation's hands to feed the friendless who had nowhere else to flee ; — and back of the nation soon were all the nations of the world.

Engracia had just mentioned, as her own discovery, that when a city has taken possession of your imagination, you see it in the likeness of a woman — one

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of its beautiful women whom you have known. "We know the dear Ludwells are safe in London, but when I think of San Francisco, I see Clare — smiling just as she would smile if something impossible like this should happen: for how could she believe it! Of course she is only a girl, but San Francisco is a girl-city."

"That's because you only know a girl's side of it. Did you ever read Bret Harte's 'San Francisco'?"

Engracia never had and was confident she would not like it. "His San Francisco, I suppose, would be a city of boy pirates!" Her mother smiled — they were absolutely demoralized and idle, waiting for whatever news should come next. Engracia clasped her hands behind her head, then hastily detached one hand to hide a yawn: early rising and subsequent excitement were beginning to have their effect. "What will it do to them as a family?" she asked, still harping on the Ludwells, their representative San Franciscans.

"If California Street is gone, they have lost their home. They can build a handsomer house, but that one held all the little things they loved —"

"And piles of things they'll gladly never see again — to speak the truth about that dear house. It might almost be worth a moderate fire to get rid of some of those Friendship's Offerings!"

Caroline did not answer: what she saw in that house was one room silently burning alone as if the whole city were its pyre. The room where she kept her first vigil with grief, where she left her youth and the last of her dreams of personal happiness: — she

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saw the mob of flames peer in, climb in, lick their way across the carpets to the still white bed — empty, quiet, no outcry, no resistance — the house gives up its ghost with not one of all who loved it and cherished its memories to stand by and watch its fall. What is one house? But let it stand for the city that could never be the same again — not the highest culture nor the latest word in art nor the subtlest intellectual atmosphere, perhaps, but such kind hearts and such gay, sweet hospitality and pleasure, like a city of children, of young girls. It was typical, too, in a way, that San Francisco on her last night should have been listening to “Carmen”: for she had her blood of the Latins strong in her maddest hours. But if there was never a night in the year when theater entrances did not blaze and carriages line her residence blocks and lights and music go on till dawn, the kitchen-doors had their story too. Annie, at Roadside, broke into tears when she heard that her first “place” in the city was gone. “Sure, if that house was to have a funeral, you’d see the long string of poor bodies would be walking miles to pay their respects — them that had their hands filled and their hearts fed from its doors, and nobody the wiser! Their right hand would n’t know what their left’d be after doing, and they not a care in the world! And that’s the kind that mostly does forget.”

Mrs. Scarth had been repeating these words and trying to copy Annie’s rich and mournful accent when the house-call rang through the office. Engracia flew to the telephone.



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“— From New York, dated eleven to-day, signed ‘Gifford Cornish,’ ” Central recited.

“Then it’s for my brother.”

“‘Mrs. Henry Scarth,’ it’s addressed — answer prepaid.” Engracia laughed to herself — “He would n’t forget that if the whole world were burning!”

“Are you all safe at Roadside?” was the message — nothing more: he had not asked, “Is the Tract still there?” Whom else had he thought of on that coast? Mrs. Rivington had given up Overleap months ago. Strange they had heard nothing! An engagement like that could not have been kept out of the papers.

Engracia’s smile sank into her heart, and the words, “Are you all safe at Roadside,” remained a scandalous comfort all that day and next day, while the great disaster spread. Everything below Post and Sutter Streets had gone; — they went and Van Ness Avenue was the city’s last stand, with ranks of fine houses blown up as a barricade — many of them, in the zeal of ignorance, sacrificed for nothing.

On the second day, or third, — every hour of crowded rumor seeming half a day, — it was Tom’s turn to be sucked into the calamity. Out of that back chapter of his own which he had called finished, came a cablegram dated Seoul: “Can’t hear from Mary last address Adler San Francisco can you help?” signed “S. Gladwyn.”

His women fell upon him: “*Why* did you never tell us Mary Gladwyn was in San Francisco, you weird child?”



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"I did n't know it myself," said Tom. The statement sounded odd, yet his astonishment was conclusive.

"Would she have been a patient? — how dreadful!" said his mother.

"More likely a nurse; — either way, it's not a good place to be: I must go down to-night, from Marysville. The stage would mean another day."

"Can you get into the city?"

"There must be some way. If I find her, mother, what about her coming up here?"

"Of course," said Caroline with suspicious haste. "While we have a bed to spare we are open to refugees."

"These are my friends," said Tom dryly.

"You won't forget, Tom, the check Uncle Benjamin sent us for cases at first-hand? Suppose Miss Gladwyn should not care to come up here, with her family so far away?"

"You mean, if I find her, it might go toward helping her home? I don't think she would take a cent of it, in the first place —"

"And perhaps deporting Mary Gladwyn might not be such a very good use for it, after all," Engracia added slyly. "If she's a nurse, I should think she might be needed right where she is."

Tom looked at his women-folk, mute, badgered, but unresisting. Engracia flew at him suddenly with a wild hug, the assault incidentally hiding that he blushed. All day at intervals, while the rummage went on for old clothes or spare ones to send to the

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refugees, she continued to smile to herself; but the mother's heart contracted at this threatened revival of an alien past which held so much, apparently, that Tom had never touched upon with his family.

Tom was off, with a hack, for Marysville.—“and Mary”! Engracia laughed in secret. Often she had speculated about those ladies he had escorted on that great war-time journey he had made so little of. She had been much more worried than it was good for one's mother to know over the pretty-cousin episode, and she hailed the advent of a Mary as a timely diversion—if, indeed, the earthquake had not been planned on purpose to bring those two fateful lives together.

“But why did n't she let him know she was there?—busy, I guess; and perhaps he's not the only boy in the world for her.”

Tom and another man, in search of his wife, missing since the disaster, hired a launch to take them across the Bay from Oakland. They were landed somewhere up near the Presidio, in the midst of a transportation depot, an improvised repair shop, and a collection of damaged automobiles commandeered for the city's use. Automobiles do not last long when driven over brick-piles.

While he was getting his bearings in the confusion, Tom looked on enviously at a youth dressed like one of the *cognoscenti* in sport clothes, covered with grease and soot, who alternately cranked a sick car and ran back to observe its progressive symptoms—

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but nothing progressed. Tom made some recondite suggestion as to electric connections.

"Here!" said the perplexed amateur. "If you know all that you 'd better get down here and take off your coat. Talent like that is just what we are looking for."

Tom took his turn crouching and cranking, but chiefly studying the uncovered thing with pain for the way it had been handled. A part here and another there he touched — went in front to crank once more and listened watchfully: it hardly seemed that he had done anything.

"I think she'll go," he said. The other stepped aboard and Tom made as if to join him. "Leave me at—"

"My dear fellow, I shall leave you here. There's a junk-pile of these impenitents and the city needs 'em. — Sorry I can't have the pleasure of your company."

Tom made his bluff for freedom: he stated that important business had brought him into the trouble zone and not idle curiosity nor a desire to set up a city repair shop. But his captor called out in lively language to another youth of expensive past, equally covered with machine grease, —

"Here's a gink who knows more about machines than all of us. Annex him for the squad."

Tom temporized: "If I can get two of your invalids out of the yard by noon, will you let me have one for a few hours — case of necessity?"

"No man's necessity holds over these machines,"

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he was informed. "Their owners would like to use them if they could. This one we've been working over was new from the East—it belongs to Dalby Morton: he needed her bad enough when they carted him out of the Adler, after his operation last week."

"The Adler interests me," said Tom. "I'm trying to locate a young lady for her family abroad, whose last address was the Adler."

"Patient or nurse?"

"Nurse, I think."

"I guess they all stuck by their cases. Have you tried Mrs. Adler?"

"I can't get her."

"Symington—any of those big men would have a string of nurses on file. Symington took out Morton's appendix two or three days before the fire."

"She may not be a surgical nurse: I'm not even sure she has graduated—only I know that she is a stranger in the city."

"— Might try Langley: he assisted Symington, and he'd get you Mrs. Adler's address."

It was agreed, Tom's case being in the nature of general relief work, that he should have the use of a wheezy little roadster till night—dark was not a word one could use in burning San Francisco. "But you'll turn her in to-morrow early and report for work? Dunton" (chief of the motor-brigade composed of some of the fanciest youths in the city) "will require you at our hands."

Tom, in pursuit of Dr. Langley's supposed address, drove slowly up the long hills toward Presidio Ave-

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nue; he passed a great gray house commanding from its blank windows — it was a corner house — a vast and awful view of the city's destruction. The stately front porch was gone; the front steps were a stone-heap leading to the dust-whitened panels of the closed front door. But from the rear, where tradesmen had carried in their bundles and baskets with turkeys' legs and celery tops sticking out, blissful odors of hospitality greeted him — ghost-like one might fancy, in that dinnerless, kitchenless town! He was not deceived, though, — steak was broiling, coffee, just coming to the boil, spread its invitation on the hungry air of night; but the back of a fat old Chinaman was the only sign of a host on the premises. With a black felt hat crowded down over his large spectacles, a wadded tunic and kitchen apron, one above the other, baggy black trousers turned up at the heels of a pair of thick-soled Chinese slippers, he squatted in front of a small oil-stove backed by strips of galvanized-iron roofing. A pile of boxes screened his outdoor kitchen from eddies of wind and dust.

Tom sprang up the walk to beg supper, as the emergency custom was. Seated on a box inside the wind-break, he saw a girl with a veil tied over her head, her elbow on her knee, her cheek on her hand, — he looked again, and please God, it was Mary! At his step she turned — a gust of wind drove smoke, which was the city's atmosphere, into their faces; they groped for each other's hands, laughing — Tom, glad as a boy that his search was over. His eyes may have been the least bit moist — with smoke or happiness.



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"Where the gracious sake did *you* come from?" — she gave him her broad, splendid smile, a little broader and more wan for a certain look of strain under the fire-flush fixed upon her cheek. Her lashes were gold by nature — now they were black with soot, which changed her expression theatrically. But when she continued to smile, and looked at him straight in her old way, humorous and trustful, she seemed just herself, and all that any man could ask in a town like that at nightfall, with a corner out of the wind, — supper and warmth and welcome taken for granted.

The impassive old cook neither saw nor heard: the stranger's arrival meant simply more steak and more coffee. "You please get up." Tom rose; in the box he had sat on were loaves of fresh bread — the lid was restored, and Tom took another box closer to Mary.

"Now, where *did* you come from? Are you a refugee?"

"I came to find a refugee — I have found her." — Explanations followed.

"My poor family! — and I spent my last cent to cable them. Well, somebody has got the cent."

"The Western Union," said Tom bitterly, "has passed away as to messages, but it still feebly takes in the cents."

"I don't believe you are quite fair about that, and *that's* not what I meant."

"Oh, I know it: it makes no difference." They twaddled about nothings, watching each other's faces



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timidly, on the road to fresh acquaintance — till Tom, casually looking up, asked, "Whose house is this, I wonder?"

The old Chinaman was prepared to answer: "Mist' Mort'n house. Mist' Dalb' Mort' upstairs. I go take up supper —" This was Mr. Morton's chef, nineteen years in the family, where he had seen and heard and said nothing; he had helped the young master upstairs on his gay nights — where he lay now, alone in the dismantled chamber, everything packed for the event of flight. This was the accepted arrangement — that Wing should take up the supper tray and entertain the young boss with news of the city which he had gathered on his daily tramps for water. Thus Dalby knew that his friends were having the time of their young lives commandeering other people's machines and delivering stuff all over the city: heroes they were, while he lay on his back and gossiped with women and cooks. He heard that the Ludwell house was gone and the Ludwells were expected back at once; and wondered in sick dreams what the plan would be for Clare, and if the cousins at Roadside would shelter her. To-night, he was told, a young stranger had blown in whom the girl from Hongkong had welcomed like a brother. But these things, according to Wing, were as life sends.

Downstairs they had grown more personal — "They remember you at the Adler," said Mary — "How you came too late — I was so sorry to hear that."

"It was not too late for mother: I owe that to you, Mary, — that I was not playing around India when

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she walked into the house at Roadside alone. My sister could not get there."

"— Not to me! Your mind was set on home before you spoke to me."

"My mind was on other things, too."

"Well, here we are—in your San Francisco that you said you would convert me to, some day. We did n't think it would take an earthquake to do it.— And where are your nice cousins?"

"In London," said Tom. He blushed slightly, having feared that he might.

Mary's smile became rather set.— "So is Mr. Morton's father and his fiancée. Everybody who's Who in San Francisco seems to be somewhere else: is that why it's called cosmopolitan?"

"But you have n't told me a word about yourself—not even why you never let us know you were here. That was not friendly, Mary."

Calling her by her name, with a certain hesitation, was the only change in his manner to her, but in his whole aspect and address there was a firmer note: "He seems to have arrived," thought Mary, bracing herself with a sigh.

She gave him a sketchy account of her arrival in her native land, in charge of an invalid American lady whom she had nursed in the hospital in Hong-kong. Her patient had had a relapse for which she did not hold Mary's care on the voyage responsible—in fact she had kept her "on the case," and they had both gone to the Adler together. By the time the lady was discharged and able to go East alone, Mary

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had won friends at the Adler and favorable notice from the doctors. Mr. Morton's night-nurse had been drafted off suddenly on another case and, by a stroke of fate, Mary was on duty after her first night's watch on the morning of the earthquake. "So, here we are," she concluded. "Dr. Langley said he would look after us — if he knows where to find us; I don't know where to find him; but everything seems to be all right, if the fire does n't reach us."

"I am here to look after you now," said Tom contentedly. "Speaking of last cents, won't you let me be your banker, Mary? I am bursting with money sent us from the East to spend on worthy cases if we meet any. Won't you be my first 'worthy case'?"

Mary shook her head. "We have a house stuffed full of luxuries and Wing to stand in line for necessities, and now a friend to watch the fires don't cut us off. There are lots of things you can capture and drag in for us. — I need surgeons' gauze more than I need money."

To those who have few words, the time for deeds comes with peculiar satisfaction. Tom had often felt, with his mother and Engracia, the loneliness of one who cannot talk: he was happy now, as in the days at Wiju, when two bright and confiding countrywomen, out of the nowhere of that strange land, had sought his roof and shield. He opened his own plans with great cheer. How soon would Mary's patient be able to make another move? They wanted her at Roadside, and they could not have her — he saw

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that — without her patient. He sympathized with Morton's hard luck, but he did not exactly yearn for him as a house-guest.

"If I were Mr. Morton," said Mary, "I would n't give much for my share of your invitation *as* an invitation."

"That's nothing to him, one way or another. — But you are coming to us!"

"My plan is to go home," said Mary dryly. Plenty of volunteers are pouring in — regular tip-top nurses who don't take a cent for what they do. I came for wool, and it's proper I should go home shorn."

"You look to me awfully tired. — Come and rest, Mary! I want you to know them, and I want them to know you."

"It's very good of you all," — Mary guessed at the probable share his family had had in this invitation, — "but there is nothing to say now. I shall see you again sometime — if the fire reaches us?"

"You will see me every night: I'll come and drag in things."

"— Time's up for me: I don't think you need any one to feed you — 'Eat hearty, mate.'"

"But you must come back! — there are lots of things you have n't explained yet."

"By the way — where shall I send if I should need you?"

"The Presidio."

"Did you walk?"

"I came in a ramshackle little Ford the city loaned me."

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"You and the city seem to be on great terms!" she laughed.

"Temporarily: I am annexed, they tell me, to the transportation squad — my department is the scrap-heap."

"I see," said Mary — she glanced smiling at his hands.

He showed his handkerchief — "It has had to do duty all day for cotton-waste!"

"We have oceans of towels, but I shall not offer you any of Wing's water — he tramps miles for it in pails."

Tom lingered: "Why did n't you let us know? It was not kind."

"I was busy; but that does n't matter: nurses don't visit."

"Don't they write letters? I wrote to you — about father, and you made your mother answer. One takes a hint like that."

She looked at him subtly: something in that letter she had missed — was he accounting to himself for it, or to her? "It was a family letter," she parried serenely. "Mother was the one to answer it."

"It was to you."

"Well, it does n't matter now."

"Not if you understand — now!"

## CHAPTER XXX

THE fires abated, or they seemed to, by day; at night, watching from their hill, they saw fresh fires advance or old ones flare up formidably and storm the blank, black night. A dry, wind-driven pall shut out the stars, the friendly lights across the Bay, the mountains where Tamalpais and his brethren held aloof guarding a useless waste of ocean. The city panted on its hills of hot ashes — a thousand homes, stored with the blessings of rich years, gave up their all in one vast, smoking urn of sacrifice.

Mary and Tom sat on their packing-boxes, in the lee of the big house in its staring emptiness, Mary in a coat whose folds, even after a sea-voyage, kept the subtle odor inseparable from the East. Over her head, tied under her chin, she wore the "calamity veil" which had brought San Francisco's dames to a common level from the pride of French millinery to the humblest head-covering under the sun. Whether bent over cooking-pots and cradles and camp-fires of the West, or brightening the fields of Europe's corn, the woman's kerchief has been the badge of her ancient lot of service, bond or free; and whenever she returns to it, the effect is somehow appealing, as if we saw her in her immemorial tasks since the foundation of the race.

Often they were too tired to talk — always they



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were wary of the past. Each must have felt this to be the one chance of a new beginning, with a fear to have it hurt — and for each the day's work was sufficient for the day. There were campers of the city's poor in a little park not many blocks distant, and at night young people singing. No one hesitated to be sentimental, or even religious ; it was the tune of "Frank-scot" they listened to one night, and the familiar words came in snatches on the wind :—

"I need thee, blessed Jesus."

Suddenly, Mary broke down and gave one hard sob, and Tom had nearly spoiled all and kissed her. But she did not know it or dream it — who would with Tom ! She recovered herself and they sat awhile longer staring with strained, sleep-laden eyes at the spectacle they were so horribly weary of, yet could not cease to watch.

When Dr. Langley said his patient could be moved and that the country was the best place for him, Tom was pleased, although somewhat surprised, at Dalby's ready acquiescence. Dalby had abundant time for speculating upon various consequences of the disaster that were most likely to affect himself. He counted upon the postponement of his marriage as one of them. Mr. Morton and Roberta had not heard of his operation : on his father's account the news had been delayed till the assurance could be added that his son was out of danger ; and on the third day came the Disaster. San Francisco's capital operation covered the rest — so these two he had not heard from, but

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time pressed. The latest plan had been for them to cross together late in May for the June wedding. Presents he knew had been arriving at Overleap; his soul stifled for a respite. From actual heroism on the day of the fire, he had relapsed, through confinement and reaction from nerve-strain, into a very primitive state of selfishness, and his thoughts hovered insanely upon the vision of Clare Ludwell at Roadside, where she had stayed once before when he fancied himself rather jealous of that good-looking Cousin Tom.

The journey accomplished itself wonderfully — by boat to Vallejo Junction and up the valley by train, every official at their service; from Sacramento an automobile to save change of cars for Marysville. Their amusingly small luggage was carried into the low, dark rooms at Roadside in their deep summer shade, and the guest-room with two closets received that “‘distinguished club-man,’ Mr. Dalby Morton,” as Engracia put it to her appreciative mamma.

The two girls made friends without any delay, while one showed the other where “things are kept.”

“Servants hate to be bothered: you *will* let me wait on myself?” said Mary.

“Proud to have you! but you’ve nothing to do with brooms and dustpans.”

“I’m his nurse — I expect to take care of his room.”

“You’ll not sweep rooms in this house, if I can help it! Don’t you suppose we know all about you, Mary Gladwyn?”

Mary chilled imperceptibly: Engracia wondered if she could have caught the meaning of her mother’s

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care-worn cordiality and the shy and fearful look she cast at Mary's large, brave smile and somewhat disordered mass of copper-gold hair which blazed up the walk in the afternoon sunlight. Tom went about the house, silent, looking happy, ordered about by Mary quite as if he were used to it. "This is something like!" Engracia remarked to herself, seeing it all and very much pleased with Mary. (We don't know what she had expected and it never was known.) — "It's a poor earthquake that can't shake up something good for somebody!"

"Did you know, Tom, that Clare is coming to us in about a week?" said Mrs. Scarth when there was quiet in the house.

"I thought it quite possible," said Tom.

"Well?" said his mother suggestively.

"He may be gone by that time. I don't see how I could have got out of asking him."

"No; certainly not; but had we better let Cousin Anna know?"

"They will know probably before they get here: they'll hear from friends in New York."

"No, not now: everybody's lost. I think I ought to tell Cousin Anna he is here."

"You can't do it except with a telegram to meet them on the train. Why fuss about it? They will have to see each other more or less for the rest of their lives."

"But staying in the same house — and so close to his marriage?"

"We are not supposed to know about his marriage ;

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we can't help it, and he can't; it's the way it happens in earthquakes."

Engracia had her word also with her mother, when their turn came for comments on the situation.

"I think we are going to have a 'remarkably hectic' time of it here for the next few weeks: — *we* must be as quiet as mice."

"I understand, child," said Caroline, fully aware to whom the insinuation pointed.

"You *will* remember Tom is out of it absolutely, as far as Clare is concerned? He does n't even feel anything in that quarter; — and don't you see what a nice refugee he has brought us?"

"Why — Miss Gladwyn is a nice girl, but —"

"No 'buts' at all: she's a frightfully nice girl. She can have me!"

"I hope Tom is not as precipitate as you are."

"All I ask is — please put Clare out of your blessed mind. It is dangerous even to think a thing one must n't speak of. Mothers do have an awful time of it with their children's goings-on; — 'to stand and be still' —" Engracia rose and threw her arms around her mother. "What else have you got on your poor mind? I can read you! What are you keeping back?"

"Something that may make the situation more 'hectic' for you, my dear; but as you say, I'll 'be still.'"

"Don't you be still with me! That's different again."

Caroline smiled while she hunted up the last "Chronicle," and, folding it at a certain item, offered

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it to her daughter: her heart sank as she watched the effect. The Chamber of Commerce, or some other body in New York of equal strength financially, had subscribed a huge sum for San Francisco, but were not proposing to throw it into the Bay, which would have been much the same as handing it over to the supervisors. They were sending out Mr. Gifford Cornish to fix upon a proper plan for its administration—it ran above half a million; and, as Mrs. Scarth observed, “it will be quite a chore for him. But I don’t believe he will go back without paying us a visit.”

“Mother, if you ask him up here, I will never forgive you!”

Caroline replied, unmoved, “I should not dream of asking him, but if he should ask to come or comes without asking—he will find me, at least, precisely the same.”

“As what?”

“As before that wretched episode which has nothing to do with us or with him. How is he responsible for a silly woman? She deceived herself, and her folly has been its own punishment. I think he came off with flying colors.”

“Yes; if you like those colors,” said Engracia.

Looking for the paper afterwards, to show the same item to Tom, his mother discovered only half of it—the significant sheet was gone.



## CHAPTER XXXI

A MARKED change took place about this time in the disposition of Mary's patient. As a convalescent she had not found him easy to manage. He obeyed her now implicitly; he hoarded his strength, avoided strain and ate as if training for a sporting event. With Tom he discussed the merits of the high-power car which had brought them up from Sacramento and was said to be for sale at a bargain. Tom demurred at the bargain. But why did Morton want a car before he was fit to drive one? He took it as a symptom of the sick man's restlessness and boredom.

Meanwhile the Ludwells were crossing the continent to take the share awaiting them in the present developments. Silent beside his wife in their drawing-room, or talking with men in the smoker, Thomas Ludwell pondered the financial situation on the West Coast since the fire had swept so many pieces from the board. His sympathies were active — equally was his mind of an inveterate combiner, and never had he felt so profoundly, awesomely inspired. He worked with gods, not men. Here was San Francisco crushed by a blow no man could foresee, and, lo, a harvest of opportunity — for a few commanders of free capital with faith in the city's resurgence. He had faith and capital and the nerve to stake much, if not all, with the courage to lose if his prophecies should fail. Nor did



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sentiment interfere with the prospect of gains built on the public misfortune. Sentiment was the music he marched to, but opportunism was his sword and armor. His charity and his good nature were boundless: he paid out of hand without stint, he worked on committees (and incidentally had many valuable moments in private with Gifford Cornish), he shook everybody by the hand in a glow of thankfulness at his own inconsiderable share in the general prostration, and, hearing incidentally of Tom's enforced labors on the scrap-heap, sent him up a little roadster to play with, and mentioned that he might be a passenger in it himself before the summer was over. There may have been some other hints as to the future of the Tract, but these Tom was expected to keep to himself. While we need not attempt to lay out plans the financier had not himself studied in detail, it is safe to suppose that he was ready to raise his bid for the Rivington stock, seeing the Torres Tract now as a pawn well on its way to the king-row.

Tom kept his forecastings to himself necessarily, only still more unyieldingly did he combat Engracia's efforts toward a second venture into the market — this time the Eastern market — for young and inexperienced secretaries. "Wait till the summer is over; then we'll know more than we do now," was his cry. Engracia called it the Valley of Indecision.

Tom took the girls out one by one in his little two-passenger car, but his invitations to Mary never seemed to fit her hours off duty — though what duties could so seriously absorb her now, he failed to under-

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stand. Dalby could not motor, yet he did not require watching like a child. Mary — without watching — had observed that he was uneasy whenever from his sick-room window he saw Tom spin down the road with Clare at his side.

Clare's coming had filled the house — she had been there a week — with singing and laughter and visions of distracting new clothes. What a sensation she would have made amid the brick-piles of her native city! San Francisco's proud dames had shortened their skirts and wore stout boots, and chiefly the primitive head-gear named for the occasion. This is not to deny that the whole house rejoiced in her as a sight and still more as a sound. She came home with a voice half an octave greater in range, rich with health and buoyant with excess of temperament. Its fresh tones woke the darkened rooms in their hot stillness in gushes of delicious sound; the maid went softly about her work to listen, and the stout refugee cook paused in her egg-beating, for she too had temperament, and a waist like a flour-sack.

Upstairs, Dalby's nurse observed that with the first waking of that voice the convalescent would lie back and close his eyes and a light moisture would break out on his white face. Nurses may see — they do not speak. Dalby took no more heed of Miss Gladwyn as a witness to his moods than of the duster she used faithfully to save work for others.

It was the hottest day of an exhausting week. There was no one in the parlor but Clare, at the piano, and Dalby stretched in his long chair near the door

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into the garden. Outside, listening to the singing, Mrs. Scarth sat with her sewing, placidly unconscious of being in the way. Such, at least, was Dalby's opinion : it was the first moment he had had with Clare alone since the excitement of her arrival had gone like wine through his veins. She had been trying over songs of the new composers, the "tone-poets" — daring, suggestive, but not restful to the untrained ear.

"Now something old, please ; something you have outgrown," Cousin Caroline pleaded.

"All my old music is burned up, cousin. — How will this do?" Clare could not see that "cousin" had been called away. Dalby was her only audience ; he leaned from his chair and softly closed the door ; a breeze might have done it. Notes of the prelude rippled forth, hushed, rapid, checked — as a runner breathes while listening. He knew the words that followed — spring and early dawn in the forest, and a recitative which brings in the first note of a waking bird — then the girl-soprano, in an impassioned crescendo ; he lay back and breathed heavily.

"Now in the morning of life I stand,  
And I long for the touch of your hand: —  
I am here, I am here at your door,  
Oh, love — oh, love we will wait no more."

Everything — even the house was gone ! The room was dust and ashes where she sang it last, with him beside her on the music-bench — the blissful old room in the afternoon light, that last day before they quarreled ; and she dared to sing it now. It was an invitation or it was cold-blooded mockery.

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"For God's sake! could n't you wait till I am out of the house?"

He had closed his eyes. After a silence she said, "When are you going?"

"Come — come here, please!"

Clare came and took the hassock at his feet. They looked in each other's eyes long without speaking.

"Why did you sing that song? — or don't you care?"

"You ought to be proof against my songs by this time."

"You know I am tortured with the sight of you. — I can't go on with this marriage; it's hell!"

"Do you intend to behave like a scoundrel?" she whispered.

"Do I intend to marry her and say nothing? — that kind of a scoundrel nothing shall make me."

"Why do you say that to me? — if it's true."

"The right one to say it to is not here; when she comes it will be too late. If she wanted to keep in touch with me, she should not have gone to Egypt after my mother died."

"You did not ask her not to, did you?"

"Of course not! — if people care, they understand."

"Why did you go in for it in the first place?"

"That is a question for you to ask! We were great friends — we've never been anything else. She was straight with me like a man and I was straight with her — about you."

"Do you call this straight? — Keep your word like a gentleman."

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"How did you keep yours?" Dalby leaned and took her hands.

"I kept it — to you! — not to that — whatever it was — that came to our house —"

"I have never been so since — I swear it."

"Swear it to Roberta, then: I am glad she has done more for you than I could."

"I did it for you — you know I am mad about you. I dream of you at night. It's torment to be in the house with you here like a stranger —"

"We must *be* strangers! Aren't you well enough to go away?"

He was quick to seize the note of pleading: "Clare — dearest — we must go together. There is no other honest way. Nobody needs us as we need each other. You are not happy — are you? You laugh, but are you happy?"

She rose — "You can't say those things to me; you are mad!" As she swept past him with a look, he sprang to hold her; she tore herself away, and he fell back with a low groan. The sight of his weakness conquered.

"Oh, my poor boy! I have hurt you!" They were in each other's arms; she was left to make the fight alone and she was not strong enough. They loved each other in a fashion which is too old to be tampered with, even in modern clothes and in houses of the just.

Thereafter he sat much in silence, smoking hard, or with eyes closed, feigning sleep. And he had bought the six-and-sixty.



## CHAPTER XXXII

THE two machines stood side by side in the old tavern coach-house : Morton's long, formidable car shining with brass and varnish, upholstered for passengers like a liner, Tom's able little craft painted service-gray, clean as a cruiser going into action. They were not near enough equals to be rivals. Between the two owners there was the greatest amicability.

Dalby had taken out his car first with Tom at the wheel — they came back with parts reversed ; Dalby white about the mouth and fresh-cheeked, but ghastly tired. He slept badly that night, driving on a road that dropped off high places slowly, or Clare stood square in the track and held up her hand too late ; or she sang and he was on the bench beside her — “Oh, love — oh, love, we will wait no more.” But that was no dream ; it was a treacherous vision between dark and dawn — birds in the oak's high chambers peeping drowsily and the garden silent, dusk, and cool awaiting the scorching day.

Finally he could ask ladies — he took them all one day, all except Mary, who pined for one afternoon alone in the empty house to think her own thoughts — perchance to think about herself, lost as a nurse must be ordinarily to her own identity. Mary thought about herself and one other person — on whose habit of being late she had counted. She sat under the ap-



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ple trees where the fruit was large and green, and slow teams crawled past with loads of hay on the road hid by the oleanders.

Tom's coming home early surprised her, but after the first look she did not shirk the truth: he had come on purpose — she must give him his chance at last. He sat on the grass at her side, his strong hands locked about his knees and his brown throat loosely collared; he had brought a coat and thrown it down where Bran, seeing nothing amusing in prospect, took it for his own use and went to sleep on it. Then Tom made himself understood as men of his type always have, though not in words to be recorded.

Mary gave him frankly to know that it was neither small means nor long waiting that stood between them, were marriage possible on other — the true — grounds.

"Is this wisdom, or don't you care for me?" She saw again the pain in his long, gray eyes; he had looked at her so in the Bruces' garden when she denied him that imagined journey home. She had never regretted doing so; the same instinct warned her now.

"It is more wisdom than the other," she owned, frankly, yielding as far as she dared; "though I don't think I do care for you enough, or I could n't be so wise — could I?" He did not answer her. "I don't ask you," she went on hurriedly — "I just want to *tell* you — it is one of my intuitions that there has been something — very naturally — in your mind toward your cousin Clare. Not now, of course: I know you

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are honest — but — Now I'll tell you all there is of it! I overheard her one evening say to you under my window, 'How nice our Mary looks! Don't you think she is pretty happy, these days?' That was all, but it sounded what I should call intimate as regards you — which is all right, of course; but as regards me — I got up and walked away, not because it was proper, but I was too mad to sit still!"

"I should think so!" said Tom, wincing. "But if you had waited a moment you would have heard me give her the only answer I could give. I have never spoken of you to her intimately, or any other way, except when I was compelled to; and yet you are partly right — Clare took that liberty because she knows that for a few weeks last year I was a fool about her. As I never spoke of it while it lasted, I was not bound to tell her when it was over. Don't you know — this moment, Mary, who it is that can hurt me? If you had made such a speech to me about Clare, that would have hurt — that you could have made it! Clare is nothing to me but a pretty cousin whom I shall always be fond of —"

"You *won't* say these things if it hurts you — please?"

"It does n't hurt me. If there had been more to it, I should have told you in the first place, but there was n't. She was the first person I saw after I got home — I saw her first just after my father died. She was holding mother in her arms."

"Don't — please don't!" said Mary. "I feel so cheap to have spoken as I did — as if you were n't

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you, beyond a doubt. And yet, your letter, that I could n't answer, showed me you were thinking hard about something else — underneath the words ; I can't quite believe you were a fool — then — were you ? ”

“ Clare was here in the house at the time,” said Tom. “ Yes, you were right — then, but you are not right now. It's too bad to waste time on it ! — Is this all that stands between us ? ”

“ Oh, no — there are other things ; serious things one need n't be ashamed to speak of. There are my parents, with their work so far away. I'm about all they have, except the work. My poor doctor-mother did n't like Hongkong, but it's nearer than California.”

“ Is this all — absolutely all ? — because a mother as unselfish as yours would n't be against me in this, I'm certain she would not — if you were willing to show her that you cared for me.”

It was not quite all, but the rest was difficult. Mary was too wise to say, in so many words, “ I cannot feel at home with your mother ; I should not be happy as the third woman in this house, even as your wife.” She kept these thoughts to herself.

“ But won't you be engaged to me, dear ? ”

“ No ; long engagements are wearing — and weakening. When we are able to think of it at all, there need n't be any engagement.”

He laid his head on her knees, his boyish head of sun-warmed, rumpled hair, and she stroked it, but

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not in the matter-of-fact way in which she had comforted many a man in pain.

"I hear them coming," she said. "And I ought to be in the pantry this minute making my patient a peach-cobbler."

Tom went with her, ostensibly to crack ice, and, a pantry being a place devoted to realities, Mary changed the key at once.

"I must get away from here soon, you know: it's a farce my staying, as it is. When a patient asks his nurse to go motoring —"

"But you are staying with us: you are our refugee."

"I am a nurse without a case, and hardly any aprons. I must earn some money, and then I must go home. I suppose" — she went on glibly, in spite of his reproachful look, — "I suppose the San Francisco millionaires are doing their banking in hot ashes about now? — we ought to know — having seen the ashes! Mr. Morton does n't discharge his nurse — could it be because he cannot pay her till his father comes home? That would be more embarrassing for me than for him."

"Mary, Mary!"

"It's no new thing for these Gladwyns to sponge on you, Tom; — I'll take you up on that offer you made me in the city when we were so proud to be simply alive. I want my fare down, and a trifle over for — aprons."

They parted with the gloomy assurance on Tom's part that his pockets would not suffer for her fares

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or her aprons — he was still the banker for large sums — and the motorists came up the path. Mrs. Scarth had not quite mastered the hat-and-veil question, and was somewhat disheveled in appearance as well as shaken in nerve by Dalby's unexpected style of driving. Engracia had not wanted to go, and Clare had something on her mind that made her cheeks blaze even more than facing the sun on the front seat coming home. Dalby alone looked better for the ride. He mounted the stairs slowly and was overtaken by Clare, who turned in the upper hall and asked, "How did it go this time?"

"You and I, next time!" He caught her hand and kissed it.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

A REFUGEE cook had been added to the household at Roadside—much reduced in her own eyes by her present humble situation. I forget what great lady of the late metropolis she boasted she had lived with and had had a kitchen-maid and a Japanese to do her bidding. Annie, Mrs. Ludwell's ex-chambermaid, now did the upstairs work in addition to waiting, with a few volunteer attentions to Miss Clare for the sake of being near her and exchanging a mournful word now and then about when "we lived on California Street."

Annie had written to a friend at Overleap (where they were very busy getting ready for the June bride's return) that, "We have got your bridegroom here with us, and any one with half an eye could see he's in no hurry to get well." Maggie Wittle, the friend, might make what she liked of the remark; she was one that kept a still tongue in her head. Further tax was laid on that still tongue a few days later: Annie Galway, sitting up late for reasons, in the Roadside kitchen, wrote out the day's events to her friend, with a warning not to let a word escape her as to these developments which would "all be in the papers soon enough, let them hush it all they could." Maggie might depend on what followed as the truth.



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The day was a Saturday and the cook's day out, but too hot to go walking in the afternoon. She had asked Annie to go out with her as soon as her dishes were done, and that was how she turned her beds down at five instead of half past eight, and found the note a good three hours sooner than Miss Clare, the poor thing, intended when she pinned it on the sheet where the bedspread would hide it. It was sealed, and it had Mrs. Scarth's name on it, which looked queer enough and they both in the same house. And only for Mr. Scarth coming in to tea on time, which he seldom did, his mother could not have caught him and the two got away so soon. It was n't while you 'd peel a potato after she read the note, when they was off in his little car flying down the road and the dust swallowed them. And Miss Scarth and the trained nurse that's in it sitting and saying nothing at their dinner like there was a death in the house. And the table to stand waiting — here it is going on for ten o'clock, and set for four to make out like they would all be coming back together when who would n't know the two was chasing after the other two!

That very afternoon it was, Miss Clare had gone off with Mr. Morton, him driving his own car, and nobody seen them go; but when it come on late and everything so queer-like, Annie, to satisfy herself, had looked through Miss Clare's things and her jewel-box was gone and clothes she 'd never need on a bit of a ride, and Mr. Morton's heavy coat which he never wore it since he come, and his bag and the

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dressing-things off his bureau ; — “ and if the papers is n't full of them two before you 'll be reading this my name 's not Annie Galway. But don't you believe anything only what I 'm after telling you ; for if they 're caught, things will be hushed up, but it wouldn't be me that would be in your mistress's shoes, not for all she 's got in the world — ”

The little four-cylinder fledged down the road, not later, as Annie had said, than half after five, giving the pair of mad children barely two hours' start. They were on a long, descending grade with the open valley country below them, Caroline's head describing sharp parabolas in time to the water-breaks which occur on that road conscientiously every quarter-mile. The sun shone in their faces and flashed in Tom's eyes from the brass-bound wind-shield ; he asked if it might go down — being also a slight impediment to speed. Caroline nodded assent, and thereafter for the next mile struggled with a blowing veil catching on all her hatpins. They settled down to work, and she saw no more of the road than a flying panorama. Her mind ran on what she should say to Clare if the pair were caught, weakly foreseeing failure to say the right thing : they would not be easy to impress with any point of view but their own.

Suddenly, Tom spoke out of his share of the silence: “ Why are we doing this, mother? Do you expect to stop their getting married? ”

“ I expect to stop their getting married this way. Clare must see her father and mother first. ”

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"They have never refused her anything, have they?"

"They will refuse her now!" Passing to the next question, though half ashamed of it, she asked, "Where could they get a license?"

Tom answered with incredible coolness (it was astonishing how little all this seemed to move him), "Marysville or Sacramento — hardly Marysville — too near home."

"They would have to have witnesses —"

"That's easy."

"Tom," his mother ventured, "does n't this nearly destroy you — this errand we are on?"

"Why should it, mother? It's not as hard for me as for you — *I* shan't have to talk."

"Bless me!" she cried to herself.

"Had you got that idea, too?" Tom asked presently.

"What idea?"

"That I was" — he lightly swung the car aside to avoid ruts — deep, dry ruts of last spring's teaming — "in love with Clare?"

"Why, of course I had!"

"Then get rid of it as quick as you can, please. Mine is a very different trouble."

"Have you got another trouble, Tom?" Caroline quaked before the confidence brought on by her own mistake, which Tom naturally found unbearable.

He thought she might have put it a little differently, but he merely said: "Mary was my first trouble — she will be the last."

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So that was settled in one word — the question a mother spends hours of anxious speculation and comparison over ; and both Tom's hands were busy — she could not even squeeze one in silence.

"Is it to be soon?" she asked timidly. "It was so dear of you to tell me."

"I've nothing to tell," said Tom — "that's the trouble! She does n't discourage me, quite ; she keeps me waiting."

"You have always been waiting, dear boy."

"I expect — it's my time to wait," he jerked out. — "See what narrow tires do!" He had struck a rut this time and tossed his mother clean up from the seat. It was careless — and he talked no more. The road swam past. Broken lines of trees following the fences, a house in a small front yard, grassless, swept by the housewife's broom, — bareheaded children running out to stare at the new sight on those lonely valley roads, — a cattle-yard and yearlings bucketing away with high tails. No more trees — the country dryer and poorer — lines of fence-wire, lines and lines reeling in beneath their tires as fast as the distance fed them. Crops again — green and gold, green and tan — belts of solid color and the long straight road, a gray-yellow band between. He put on speed : the gauge flicks round — past the forty-mile mark, but it does not last. She had scarcely begun to feel that pride of speed, sharing Tom's silent ecstasy, when the road breaks up into hills and hollows and sharp turns. This looks more like California — splendid sunlit oaks in a great meadow casting eastward their

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black velvet mantles of shade. The days are long, but it must be near six o'clock. A bunch of woods darkening an interval; they splash through undried mud — "Tire-tracks — fresh" Tom mentions.

"When does the Limited reach Sacramento?" Caroline inquired. He gave the hour. "We shall be too late," she said.

"Lots may happen between here and Sacramento. He's a wild driver, and he was cheated on that car."

They entered Marysville. Marysville had seen — and heard — the big red car thundering across D Street Bridge, where the legal limit is five miles. Marysville would like to see it come back that way — she would be ready for it next time. D Street Bridge leads to the highroad to Sacramento — no boulevard then! Soft, broad tire-tracks were still ahead in the deep dust unstirred at this hour of little traffic. The long May afternoon drew toward sunset and the country was too beautiful to miss with unregardful eyes. Caroline sat up refreshed by the change to coolness. Low, sharp lights illumined the black cattle in home-fields gathered after milking. Darker shadows climbed the smooth slopes, and a group of lone pines stood out on one promontory bluff where the cultivator's axe had left them — black against the clear gold west. And now the ineffable coast line lifted its pure blue, and they were on the last lap of their seaward course. They make up time — thirty, forty, forty-five, fifty — Caroline exults that the little car can bear it. Tom's hand never rested playing the shuddering wheel; she forgot why they were doing this; she was in high,



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hard spirits — was this in every one of us — the passion for quick decision and any excuse to chase something ahead of us with a fair chance or not — immaterial so we beat?

“I don’t see how *he* can stand it,” she said in a shaken voice.

“I expect he and his car will both be in trouble before they reach Sacr—”

“Stop!” shrieked Caroline; “there they are!”

Tom had stopped because he was obliged to — to avoid a big red car half in the road, half over the soft bank, but empty. Caroline trembled at sight of the disordered wraps and cushions thrown down —

“It’s not an accident,” Tom assured her. “They did n’t go over, but they could n’t get her back. They must have tried to pass some one in a hurry.”

Investigation showed they would not have had help to get away — the wagon-tracks all led north. They had walked, the hapless pair; footprints were plain on the dusty side-path. The pursuers drove on slowly till they came to a house not far from the road and Tom stopped to make inquiries. A girl ran out from the porch, reconnoitered, and ran as swiftly back again — it was Clare.

The car was brought up to the gate and Tom opened the door for his mother.

Caroline staggered to the ground. “She’s probably there alone — if I only knew what it means! Tom, I’m an awful coward.”

“Well, mother, you don’t have to say much: it’s up to them!”



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As a last surprise, it was Clare herself who opened the door, exclaiming, —

“Cousin! oh, it *is* good to see you — but we did hate to have you beat us!”

Caroline's prepared speeches left her: she kissed the girl's cheek mechanically, and they went inside and seated themselves face to face on a tawdry little sofa under a photograph, life-size — probably the respectable citizen whose house the runaways had appropriated. Caroline speculated upon nothing except the fact that, while the place and circumstances were so distorted as to be almost unbelievable, Clare herself seemed just the same, only nervous and sweeter. She had been crying — but her words told nothing at first: they came haphazard.

“Did you ever see anything so awful as this room! — I didn't know there were such rooms. — Oh, cousin, what do you think of us, anyhow! Well, it doesn't matter now what anybody thinks. We are in such a frightful fix. I thought at first you were the doctor; I ran out to tell him this was the house. We telephoned from nowhere — we don't know these people's names nor their number — Then I saw it was you, and it seemed so senseless to stand there and be caught — but I *am* glad you have come!”

“Are you here alone? Was this part of your plan?” asked Caroline dazed.

“Oh, no, no! Did n't you pass our machine? Dalby worked over it till he was almost dead. We came here to find a telephone and the house was locked, but we looked through a window and saw

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they had one and Dalby forced the hook of a screen door—and that finished him! Don't mind if I cry—I've a great deal—to answer for!" Clare swept her handkerchief over her face. Her eyes had looked into Caroline's like a child's, woeful and appealing: the woman would have been a stone who did not embrace and comfort her—shocked by her first trouble on the road to easy joy. "Oh, cousin, he has hurt himself. He was not fit in the first place—and he had a horrid time with the car, trying to get it up the bank. He cranked and cranked!—and, of course, he wouldn't let me help. I've been very thoughtless—How Mary Gladwyn would despise me: all her work undone!"

"He is most to blame on all accounts," said Caroline, "but that's no comfort to you. I shall have to say, though—you must not take too much for granted: we will help you all we can, but not to carry out this wretched plan you started on.—Come," she rose taking Clare's hand; "let me see your sick man."

"You won't scold him, will you?—he's very sick!"

Caroline smiled. "Tom is down at the gate; would n't you like him to come in? We shall need him—he won't scold!"

Dalby lay on a strange bed in a room of pathetic adornments which had never known a fire. Many covers of a cheap and cottony description were over him; he was shaking with a chill, but he was silent and courteous and uncomplaining. Such first aids as the house supplied, after Tom had lighted the kitchen

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fire, were administered, a distress signal hung out at the gate, and they sat around waiting for the doctor. Dalby did everything he was told, swallowed everything presented to his lips—including the cup of bitter fate, all with equal grace. Having lost, he remained winner still in his own incontestable field of charm and sweetness and sportsmanlike behavior. Caroline endeavored to keep a sense of justice and recall the thing he had done, while watching beside him with looks of motherly kindness, and feeling her hand clasped now and again by Clare stealing in to gaze at the poor boy, white and smiling through his agony. Those two simply spoke with their eyes—with instinctive delicacy Clare gave no other sign of emotion, nor did he seek it.

The young woman who answers the Farmers' Line at Sacramento's central office became interested toward nightfall in a series of calls which rang up in quick succession from a mysterious house on the Marysville road—"north," and "within ten miles of the city." This was the sole description—First, a man's voice which broke off and left the message unfinished; then a girl's, and a second man's. None of the three knew exactly where they spoke from—in whose house nor the telephone number, and only the last voice gave names.

They wanted a city garage, and next a doctor; finally—and here Central pricked her ears, being a faithful reader of the Society Column in San Francisco's dailies—Mrs. Thomas Ludwell was asked to meet "Clare" at the Sacramento Hotel as early as

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possible to-morrow (Sunday!) morning. "Clare is well," the message finished; signed "C. Scarth." Followed a long-distance call via Torresville for a Miss Gladwyn addressed as "Mary": "This is Tom. Please be in Sacramento by the morning train to-morrow. — Yes; we will meet you. Your patient has had a relapse."

So there you are! said Central: two men and a girl — probably Mrs. Ludwell's daughter — in an unknown house on the Marysville road, wanting a doctor, a mother, a Mary who was a nurse — and an ambulance-car for a sick man.

But Central's puzzle was nothing to the mystification of the worthy owners of the borrowed house when they returned, after a theater-night and a visit to friends in town, to find automobile-tracks scoring the road before their gate, the house entered, food taken, a fire burned out, and ten dollars on the kitchen-table, with "Thanks" on a blank card. Evidently they had entertained high-class burglars making their escape and behaving like angels unawares — for not a thing of value had been taken — not even the best teaspoons they had used — and washed!

## CHAPTER XXXIV

THE two girls at Roadside were seated opposite each other at Mary's early breakfast. It was next morning — Sunday, and no stage ; a carriage had been ordered from Torresville. They had finished speculating over Tom's telegram — the whole subject being one which had its obvious limitations.

"Now, Mary, don't say you are not coming back ! Don't go and do anything rash because San Francisco is burned — there are other places. If it's nursing you want, I expect to be a nervous prostrate myself before the summer is over."

"Don't joke !" said Mary, "or I'll tell you how you look. You are not always so thin, are you?"

"I should despise myself if I were n't thin ! How about you !"

"Me ! I'm as hard as nails !"

"Yes, you look like nails — I can just feel you !" There was some idle laughter while Engracia sorted over last night's mail, arrived per carriage for Mary.

"How sickening !" she exclaimed — "here is this pile of stuff for Clare and Dalby Morton — foreign letters for him. "You will have to take these with you, Mary. — Why, look here ! What has Korea got to say to our old Tom at this late day ? Does n't that postmark spell Seoul ?" Engracia held up a thin, gray envelope, male size — "Nice distinguished-looking hand — English, should n't you say ?"



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Mary looked at it with an odd expression — “I should — as I happen to know the hand.”

“Well! — in that case, would Tom mind, I wonder, if I pumped you a little?”

“Pump away!” said Mary; “he’ll not risk much that you can get out of me. That letter, I should say, was from Mr. Bruce —” she stopped with parted lips and took breath — “husband of a great friend of my mother’s. I’ve the more reason to think so, that he asked for your brother’s address and several other questions about him, the last time I stayed with them at Seoul.”

“How remarkable!”

“Is it?” said Mary. Her face turned slowly red. “Mr. Bruce handles — I think they call it — various investments all over the East for English and Scotch clients;” her matter-of-fact manner appeared a little forced. “He may want some information in your brother’s ‘line.’ He left a name for saying what was ‘so,’ as far as he knew it, and they seemed to think he knew a good deal.”

“That’s very nice to hear, but I hope his name won’t arise and haul him suddenly over there. — Could that be possible, I wonder?”

Both had endeavored to speak lightly, avoiding each other’s eyes. After a moment Mary said, “Is it the Yellow countries only you dread, or exile in a general way?”

“I dread dividing three by two — which is particularly weak in one supposed to have been brought up to that kind of thing. Papa and mamma were



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always dividing till they came here and we were buried all together comfortably out of harm's way."

Mary smiled faintly. "But you would go together now, would n't you? As you say of San Francisco—there are other places—even burial-places."

"Mary dear!"—Engracia paused. How could she talk to this exiled girl about the spell of continuity—one home, one place, one set of associations? How express that other faithless fear known only to herself!

"You look so frightened," said Mary.

"What geese we are—discussing the outside of a letter! There really is something in it, though. Don't you feel clairvoyant this morning? How did you sleep last night? Come, be a wizard—I simply can't wait till Tom comes! Take hold of this now and tell me—shut your eyes—tell me what's in it for him—and for us in consequence."

"I can tell you, without shutting my eyes; it's a list of questions about Korean mines or Korean irrigation, and it asks the favor of 'an early reply.' And I assure you, any young man may call himself lucky who is able to oblige Mr. Reginald Bruce."

"Worldly, worldly! But I am talking you out of your breakfast: that egg is stiff and cold. Do'ee take another—"

"I wish sometimes everything else was stiff and cold!" Mary rose quickly. "It was hard to come here—it's harder now to go! I must get off at once—Oh, how good you have been to me!" They embraced and said little things to each other, not disguis-

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ing the probability of a long if not a last good-bye. Mary had a strong suspicion about Tom's letter which made her feel a traitor in Engracia's arms. She answered her plea of "Don't forget us, Mary!" with a silent kiss.

"But why don't I give you this?" Engracia produced the letter. "You will see Tom to-night."

"Oh, no," Mary resisted: "I might up and lose it, or forget to give it to him."

"Not you! Take it along — we don't know when he will be back. It's curious how little we do know — what's going on down there."

"Verdicts," said Mary: "family and doctors' — It will mean another operation for him, poor wretch, when his other goings-over are through with."

Engracia thought about the letter, alone in the house all day. That a gentleman with foreign capital to invest should ask long-distance questions of a young American whom he had never seen — as she supposed — appeared, to even her unbusiness mind, improbable. Much more likely he had a favor to confer, on a friend of his friends who had assisted them in war's extremity. Yet it was possible Mr. Bruce had written to inquire about Mary, without Mrs. Gladwyn's knowledge, to spare her mother the suspense. She was startled to find how she clung to this solution.

What was the antidote that had killed the germ of adventure in her blood? — an engineer's daughter shrinking at her time of life from the first breath of change! A year ago — not six months ago — visions of that voyage Tom had taken — sinking down the

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west and outward to the purple isles — would have raised a wild rabble of dreams, and glorious spirits equal to any alteration of circumstances. What was the counter-spell? And why should it load her with despair to see her life ending suddenly in exile? What would be left when they came back — and why, if they all went together, should she care?

It was the first of three days of record-breaking heat. By noon she had darkened all the downstairs rooms in front; the maids with little to do were up in their own rooms on the shaded side above the garden. She picked up Saturday's paper and read (and there was no disguising that stab of pain) the name of Gifford Cornish, the city's distinguished guest, — the late city, — who would leave for the East on Monday, his mission accomplished in a manner worthy of its generous object. Some details followed about relief work; then the names of his host and hostess over Sunday, fashionable persons with a magnificent country-house near town and not in ruins. He would not stop, going past them, without writing first: so the fading chance was gone.

A telephone-call rang through the office sending the blood to her heart. Long Distance, in Tom's voice, said, as nearly as she could hear through muffled drummings over the wire, "Can't get back to-night. Coming to-morrow — late. Yes; very hot. Mother well. Good-bye."

All to-day, then, and to-morrow, not counting night when it is too hot to sleep — "Yes; I shall need Korea or something, if this goes on."

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It was eighty in her bedroom when she rose next morning, which meant over a hundred at noon — dry heat; otherwise one would collapse. She dressed in whatever was coolest, allowing for no one around. Tom and mamma, we were thankful to say, would not need to start till late; days were at their longest and there was a fine big moon. You made your own breeze with Tom's driving, so they would not suffer — but fancy Sacramento on such a day! — “My poor people — what a gruesome errand!” And dear Cousin Anna and all her pride in Clare — and Clare, trapped between two, or three, sets of betrayals; — Clare so honest at heart, and Dalby so kind! What was the right and wrong in these things, once you had started wrong? . . . Life is like flume-walking: keep off of high places if your head is not strong — and don't look down. She endeavored to stop thinking — if one could only stop remembering! (“Put your hands on my shoulders, and don't look down!”)

Out under the apple trees the nearest sprinkler spread a slight breath of coolness; her poor plants were limp, but no watering in this merciless sun — they must pine till evening. No flowers in the house either; they would only die. Books were the last resort. She sat on the grass and pored over that “other old fellow you don't care much about” — It was not the voice of youth, but most modern voices were cheap in comparison with its “mightier movements.” It gave you starry thoughts, and poured peace and coolness through one's mood. Had Cornish foreseen a time to come when she would have need of that

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pure well? She turned to the sonnet she called "his": —

"Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,  
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,  
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:  
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;  
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,  
God being with thee when we know it not."

Her heart cried out: "At least he is not a hypocrite!" — such cant as this — from him to her, were he what his false friend had described him — impossible! He might never speak of love again, but when he had spoken he was — he had been true! Genius has this power over those susceptible to its messages: it goes beneath argument and speaks to the last witness, the soul.

Bran hauled himself from one spot on the grass which his body had warmed to a fresh one, or he stood and lolled at her, dribbling from a pink and panting tongue. About four o'clock he tore down to the hedge and raced barking with an automobile outside. A car that sounded like a big one purred hotly up the road and stopped. This was the maids' resting-time; in a house of so few callers no one was kept on duty for the door. Engracia rose and shook out her skirt. Bran came back brazenly, courting applause for a well-known misdemeanor. The new arrival had gone inside — this would never have been permitted had not Bran recognized a friend. She went slowly back to the house gathering nerve, sighing from excitement. There was no one in the office, but she heard steps —



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In the darkened sitting-room, by the one knife-blade of light from the garden door ajar, stood Gifford Cornish. He turned with a slight "Ah!" as he saw her.

Neither spoke at first, but she had no more doubts, nor could there be any question of why he had come. It seemed more natural than ever to see him there, to meet his quaint, depressed smile, to have him release her hand properly and then improperly take it again and look deeply, gravely into her eyes. He may have seen there a promise of what he came for; at least he could speak unhindered.

"So it was n't you! I caught a glimpse of your mother in the depot at Sacramento; she was seeing two ladies off by the Westbound. They were veiled, but one was about your height—and in tears! Your mother kissed her—twice—very tenderly. I thought she was bidding you good-bye.—Then my train pulled out.—I found the house empty!—Are you alone?"

"Tom and mother will be home to-night."

"Can you keep me till to-morrow?"

"Perfectly."

"Then I will send my car away —" He hesitated: "You won't be lost when I come back?" But when he did come, she had vanished—to advise Annie of a guest and to regulate her own dress a little. He awaited her with a worried air: his impatience of trifles told her he was very tired. There had been a long strain of some kind—a multiplied strain.

"Let us get out of the house where I can see you. And don't let's have any interruptions."



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"Not for something cool to drink, and a room to put your bags?"

"I had those things in Marysville. Come, come!"

"— Tea — a little later? We have an 'Annie.' "

"I wish you would n't bother me with your Annies. It is a whole year — and I've been sick: — no, only sick in mind — chiefly about you. At any time, if I had had the courage — but I was paralyzed. Out here, since I came, I have been busy. I was afraid to come up till my work was done, and perhaps be paralyzed again — How should I know how you would treat me? Where shall we begin?"

"Oh — *not* where we left off! Does it really matter?"

"One or two little things matter, because we both have a passion for the perfect thing — If this were true! How can we make sure?"

Engracia did not speak, but their eyes met, and he seemed satisfied. It was not to question nor extenuate — merely to restore a lost and blackened year that he went on. "I had an extraordinary visit at Overleap last spring when I went there to see you —"

She interrupted him with a look.

"— To see you," he repeated: "to ask you again to marry me, openly and above board, as I thought it quite time I should. — You knew that I was coming, did n't you?"

"Yes," Engracia uttered — pale and shivering.

He was struck by the evident shock this memory gave her. "And is there nothing you can tell me —

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why you went so suddenly? Because I have never understood what happened."

"You must not ask me!" cried Engracia. "I hardly know myself — only — if we touch it, it will ruin us somehow!"

"Oh, no; that is past. But listen: I found that she already knew of my first proposal and was hurt as a friend that I had not confided in her — so hurt that she had written to reproach me, a letter that she wished to recall. She asked me, when I received it, to return it unread, which I did, of course — Now, dear, what is the matter?" Looking down at Engracia searchingly he met the shocked amazement in her startled eyes.

"How — did she say — she came to know of your proposal to me?"

"Did n't you, quite naturally, speak of it in the course of your winter's intimacy?"

"Intimacy! Did you read my last letter? I told you distinctly the one person I had told — my mother. If you thought that, you must have believed I had lied to you — sneakingly, pretending to keep faith. Oh, this is impossible!" She tore her hands away from his that had taken them protectingly.

"There was lying without doubt. — Darling, I only thought it when I was wild with wretchedness at losing you. I went with hopes — I did n't know how strong they were until I heard your words —"

"My words? — what words?"

"I was told they were yours: did you not say — when driven to it — that you never had, never should

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care for me, never could if I were 'the last man on earth'? — Poor Lisa, her hour has come ! ”

“My hour has come. Yes, they were my words — but there was one word more : *now*, I said ; I did not want you *now* — Should you think I would have wanted you, or any part of you, after that past — your past with her — which she told me of ? ”

“Don't you see, dear child, if she could alter the truth so about one of us, she might about the other? There was a past — long past. And she knew I had never sought by a word or a look to revive it. But her mind is not a good medium for the truth at best, and we know that she was in a morbid state. A mind that appears to be sane and yet is ungovernable is very dangerous to itself and to others. Now you know why I dreaded your going there — Well, have we come through it? — have I come through it?”

“She made me feel rather ill,” said Engracia. “I lost interest in you and I rather doubted everything connected with you, for a while.”

“We have lost a whole year. I expected trouble — I should have been ready for it — especially I should have known you better. . . . But I've never had a little friend so proud — so foolish — as this! . Now, will you put your hands on *my* shoulders and don't look down?”

They smiled at each other with the old amused comradeship, in the peace of a faith renewed through this first trial of its strength. “I was saying those very words to myself — this afternoon — while you

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were coming as fast as you could — and I never dreamed it!”

“And I was saying them — coming as fast as I could — and afraid it was too late. Thank God for one misunderstanding less in this blind world! You will, now, won’t you — be my little girl — forever and ever — as long as anything lasts?”

“And if things should n’t last, would you be sick of me again?”

“Was I ever sick of you? I was hope-sick — homesick: you could easily cure me of that. It is only necessary to see each other every day; — it must be very soon, the beginning of the cure; I’m a chronic, you know.” He knew that she had taken his case in hand for life, — the child mind he had fed and helped to train, the beliefs of the budding woman he had found, and feared to trust the reckless vision. Now, to explore all the divinity within, if God would but spare them time. . . .

## CHAPTER XXXV

MR. AND MRS. LUDWELL did not delay for any morning train — they were in Sacramento themselves by morning. An ambiguous telegram stating that Clare was “well,” yet imperative as to meeting her — ! They came, prepared for trouble ; and Mrs. Ludwell had a sure premonition as to its direction. She had been vaguely uneasy about the combination at Roadside, but absorbing matters awaited them on their arrival in the desolated city, and her labors with the ladies of Berkeley in behalf of others in trouble left no time for anxieties of her own. Her husband’s wrath was such that she prevented his seeing Dalby, and conveyed his state of mind, or parts of it, to that unhappy young man, expressed in her own words. She sat at his bedside in a private room of the best hospital in the city, and Mary Gladwyn, after a few moments, left them to themselves.

Mrs. Ludwell had known Dalby from a boy ; she had coached him in children’s theatricals, and had “laughed herself sick ” when as Prince Giglio in long curls he had used the warming-pan with such unbridled effect on King Valoroso in a papier-maché nose. Why should she think of such silly things now, while he lay there who had spoiled her child’s girlhood, and pierced her to the heart of her own mother-pride.

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"Dalby," she began, "what are we to call this?"

He turned his sick eyes upon her question in silence.

"Mr. Ludwell has had it put in the papers as an automobile accident. You will remember that?"

"I am—I am going to Overleap, you know—Do you mean I am to call it that to Roberta?"

"Certainly! That is our demand—my husband's—"

"It strikes me as a pretty stiff demand," said Dalby. She waited for him to finish—"I may have lied now and then when it seemed necessary, but I am not in the habit of lying this way—with an end in view that I should be ashamed of."

"I don't know what makes lying 'necessary.' As for what young men are ashamed of—! But here are two girls to be protected. One can be touched only in her pride if all this were known; the other—I ask you to consider what Clare's position would have been if the cousins had not followed you!—not to speak of making her betray her friend. This is what comes of involving another girl before you were free."

"I am free now by an act that is done and can't be undone—"

"It *is* undone, and it must be forgotten. Because if it is acknowledged Clare's name will come into it."

"I've given Roberta a blow in the face—but that is n't marrying her on a lie."

"Your blow in the face was not so brave as it sounds: I should call it a blow in the back. The pun-



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ishment of cowardice is more cowardice — Forgive me, Dalby,” — she softened her tones which had climbed in the excitement of such unwonted speech, — “but Mr. Ludwell expects you to give us your promise: otherwise — the alternative I should be sorry to speak of.”

“Is it any worse than this?” Dalby smiled faintly.

“It would be more public. — I have never seen him so but once since I have known him — it is a touch of inheritance. I cannot deal with it.”

Dalby remained silent, thinking. A flush had risen in his face, and his hands on the bedclothes twitched. Without intending to, Mrs. Ludwell saw Roberta’s ring still on his left hand. He saw that she saw it and slipped the hand out of sight, then tossed it forth again.

“Would you have married Clare in that ring?” she asked, merciless in trifles.

“I should n’t have thought it important if I had,” he replied sullenly.

“Dalby, what is important to you? What do you believe in?”

“I believe it’s important to marry the girl you love — if you can.”

“Not if you have to steal her and break your word to another woman who is helpless because she is a lady! No; you can never have Clare now, with her father’s consent — and she will never do this again.”

“I give you my promise — to lie to the best of my ability — and I hope the doctors will finish me the next time.”

## THE VALLEY ROAD

Mrs. Ludwell sat a moment feeling unreasonably in the wrong. Then she said, rising and softly resting one hand on his pillow: "Your promise will save a young girl whom you led into wrongdoing — neither of you knowing how wrong you were. Now, may I say one thing more — though it is none of my business? Roberta is a lonely girl: she has no advisers — she doesn't need them. You have saved Clare — trust her to save you, and herself."

"Trust her while I deceive her!"

"That, you see, is your punishment — don't you see?"

"I see it's punishment," said Dalby.

Mrs. Ludwell went away, having accomplished what she came for primarily, but dissatisfied with the manner in which it had been done. Teasing thoughts of points she might have made pursued her; for instance, she might have answered Dalby's "while I deceive her" with the simple reminder that a young man can free himself from an engagement which he considers dishonorable without going into details of his conduct involving another — that of course he would see for himself, when he was ready to. On the whole, she discharged her conscience of Dalby's responsibilities; but as between Clare, whose name had escaped public comment, and her own mother in private, there remained a few words to be said, and Mrs. Ludwell made them very plain. Clare must be informed, in the first place, of Dalby's promise, which she regarded as a shameful backdown: it was not his fault they were beaten, but to stay beaten — to

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be driven into a corner and consent to an unmanly deceit like that! She listened with scarlet cheeks and distant, angry eyes fixed on the wall-paper of their hotel sitting-room.

"If I were Roberta I would kill Dalby if he dared to marry me now and say nothing! But I suppose *I* can't speak and save her as she ought to be saved!"

"There are certain plain obligations in life," said her mother coldly: "if Dalby had not been thinking like a scoundrel, his conduct would not have broken down all at once. He thought of nothing but his own happiness — which he threw away in the first place for a wretched dinner. And there is his father: — such news as this in his state of health might kill him outright. To cap the climax" — Mrs. Ludwell abandoned argument for certain details which she well knew would sting — "I happen to know that he has not paid his nurse who borrows money to come down here to nurse him again! — the girl who stood by him and lost even her clothes."

Clare was cut to the quick. "What has he got to pay with except borrowed money or checks on banks that are burned? Who was so mean as to tell you that?"

"Nobody is mean, but older people may comment on the little ironies of youthful romance — a young man who cannot pay his nurse, buying five-thousand-dollar cars to run off with, and able to finance this trip with you."

"It was only second-hand, and it was n't paid for!" Clare retorted wildly. Every point in these horrid

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accusations bewildered her the more, and she dashed herself against one after another like a trapped bird.

"— Charged to his father, I suppose — or to your father?"

"Mother, how can you be so small ! We had n't a hundred dollars between us. We were only going to Emigrant Gap." Clare scored now by sheer simplicity and childish lack of humor.

"Emigrant Gap !"

"Dalby has a log cabin down on the Lake — with a stone fireplace. We were to cook for ourselves and eat off tin plates and wear old hunting-togs. He did think of his father. He knows how arguments and talk excite him ; he thought the quickest way was best — for him and everybody. If he is a scoundrel and a cad I don't see why everybody adores him ! The men up there would do anything for him — they would have helped us with horses, anything they had. . . . Mother, you asked me once to be gentle with him — do you want me to throw him down now, when he is down ? If it's a crime to love me, he is guilty, of course, — he says he never would have got engaged if I had n't been so hard to him ; and he has changed all his habits for my sake."

"He tells you so — perhaps he believes it himself."

"Roberta does not love him — I do. I know it now. You and father can part us — he can be a coward and marry Roberta ; but he is the only one for me and I am the only one for him, if you think that means anything. You did when it was you and father."

## THE VALLEY ROAD

"And your father," said Anna solemnly, "thinks he deserves to be shot! He thinks the crowning shame is Roberta's loneliness:—not a man of her blood who could take this up when Dalby is strong enough to give an account of himself."

"Mother, do you dare call Dalby *that* kind of coward? You are perfectly mad about this. Who fights duels over a broken engagement?"

"Who, indeed! Is there anything you don't break with the most flippant impunity?—anything under heaven you call an obligation if it goes against your wishes? If the two are married, divorce settles it; if it's breach of promise, money in private or a lawsuit. Women like Roberta have to sit and bear the insult; and if they are rich, no one even pities them."

"Roberta knew perfectly well what she was doing. Dalby never denied to her—he told me so—that he loved me still. Dalby does not lie."

"There will be lying now, and whoever does it, he will be responsible. This performance is an automobile accident—remember; that is all his father and Roberta will ever know about it. They came home yesterday, and she expects him at Overleap to get strong for his next operation."

"I thought they were not coming till next week?"

"They heard of his illness in New York and hurried out here. Papa talked with them a few minutes yesterday. Mr. Morton, of course, thinks everything is all the same; he was in great spirits about the wedding.—Squalid, all of it! To think that our



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daughter, our little Clare, should be dragged into anything like this !”

There was weeping now and a mother's forgiveness ready at the first sign of softening. Dalby's mother could not reach him with her tears. Yet she may have helped him when he did not know — Mary Gladwyn, looking at her patient after he slept that night, thought how pure and peaceful a man's face it was, and how young he looked. Nothing wrong with him at all, she would have said, but so badly brought up.

It was more than hot — it was stifling that Monday in Sacramento. Hurrying down to the hospital after four o'clock, Tom saw women with pale faces wheeling slightly clad babies on the shady side of the cooler streets, young girls hatless, in high-heeled pumps, with large structures of ribbon on their heads, urchins sucking ice-cream cornucopias, horses in straw hats, spray from jogging water-carts — all the sights of midsummer in the State Capital, here in May.

In the hospital, nurses with aching feet fanned their patients by the hour. Mary stood near the elevator-shaft waiting for a pail of ice. Suddenly, as the cage stopped, out stepped Tom. She looked at him with a pucker in her forehead ; he had never seen her when she was quite to the same extent on duty. He picked up her pail and they walked down the corridor together.

“ Can you see me a few minutes ? ”

“ Well — not just this minute : after the doctors



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are gone. They have n't finished their examination."

"We are starting home in about an hour."

She remained unmoved. "I am sorry I could not see your mother again. Engracia must give her my real good-byes. — Too bad it's such a day, but you won't feel it when you get in motion."

"Mother will be sorry, too, but of course she understands. I did not ask her to come — I had to see you alone. Will it bother to have me talk to you?"

"No; because I can't let you — After the doctors have gone. This is the door — thanks!"

"Where shall I wait?" Tom persisted.

"Here, if you have time; I may be twenty minutes."

The doctors came at length and talked a few moments to Mary outside the patient's door. She did not appear to see Tom till they were shut into the elevator. Tom stepped forward and this time she smiled and her forehead cleared: "They are quite positive he will get through all right," she said. A window was open at the end of the corridor noisy with sounds from the street; they went there, and Mary perched on the sill — every moment off your feet counted in the day's work.

"I came to tell you what was in that letter you brought me: it is the greatest letter I've ever had in my life. I am going back with you, Mary."

"How does that happen?" asked Mary, trying not to look conscious. She slipped down off the sill and stood gazing steadily into the street below.

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"Wiju is starting up again with English capital. Mr. Bruce is managing director. He offers me the whole thing — resident superintendent and chief engineer. I know, of course, where it comes from, but I shall take it; and you will help me to make good?"

"I dare say!" said Mary; "am I to nurse your young rice plants or —"

"You will give a man his home. There is a little valley up between the hills — we'll build a house there —"

Mary stood in silence; she sought for a handkerchief and wiped her pale, unpowdered forehead. "Have you told your mother?"

"Not yet; she has enough on her mind."

Mary thought of Engracia's stricken look and her dreaded sum in division —

"How will this be for them — your family, Tom? Mothers and sisters can't be left out."

"It will be the saving of everything for them. I happen to know of changes coming; it can't be spoken of, but it would hurt my mother to see me undoing father's work. All that he did will go for nothing, so far as it was done in preparation for something bigger. That can never be — in our time. I could stay on and do pretty well as to salary, but all the fun is out of it — And — I may say it now — Wiju was my dream. It hurt to go and leave it. But to go back with you!"

"—And them," said Mary.

"Not necessarily. Them if they will come, but I

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don't see it that way. I know my mother pretty well. Are n't you homesick? — the Bruces' garden — do you remember that night when you sent me home? You owe me this journey, you do!"

"Please stop now, Tom; you confuse me. This is a hospital for the sick, not the insane."

"But we'll build that house together —"

"We won't do anything till we see about them. So few families have that intense home-life that yours has. It will cost — oh, it will cost like everything."

"You don't know my mother: she has drilled herself to face partings. If it means my work, and good work, she will be proud to have me go. But she may not go herself; a son is not a husband. But whether we make one family or two, I can take far better care of them. Your English pay their engineers."

"I shall not know what I am doing the rest of this day —" Mary sighed distractedly. "I knew there was a stroke of fate in that letter, but this is absurd! Nothing can be done as soon as this."

"'Long engagements are wearing — and weakening —'"

"Yes; but go now — my patient is alone."

"Will he need you at Overleap?"

"Not after he gets there; it is a house of servants, and a good local doctor. — They are going to hush this all up," she whispered. "I am very sorry for him: there are so many ways of being a fool —"

"There are ways of being wise as bad as any folly I know. Would it be a very great shock to your mother if —"

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"It would; and I shall not shock her that way — by cable."

"I could take so much better care of you on the boat, you know. And some people might think it looked better —"

Mary smiled at him pityingly: "Nurses, of course, are chaperoned everywhere they go! — As for looks, there won't be anything the matter with *my* behavior."

"That is what I am afraid of," said Tom.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

MR. MORTON had come to that stage in the chronic disorder he called life when old friends shook their heads in speaking of him, and old foes no longer feared him enough to abuse him behind his back. His rages hurt no one now ; in business his mind was asleep or woke to tragic folly. He arrived with Roberta, carefully watched by a man-nurse whom he treated as a child and who treated him like another more difficult child. Except to go up to Overleap where his son was now installed, he refused to leave the city even for a day. The conditions since the fire excited him, and for a time he seemed actually better ; less pale and shrunken and anxious-eyed. He gave orders that his table should be spread from morning to night and gathered as many of the Pacific Union and other good fellows with no club-roof over their heads as he could persuade to sit down with him. They listened daily to the story of his son's behavior in the fire, and to his brag that the boy had been running his own six-cylinder over country roads before the stitches were out of his wound. They believed what they chose and humored the rest with the charity of guests at a well-found table.

"Where has he kept himself all this time?" asked an old friend of the family. "I tried to find him — we wanted him up at our place."

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Mr. Morton rapidly and with some accidents consumed his soup. — “Place up the valley—can’t think of the name—cousins of Tom Ludwell’s—worst roads you ever saw; knocking forty miles an hour out of a new machine—chip of the old block; I was just such another at his age. Now he goes under the doctors’ hands again. Wedding put off:—saying is, bad luck put off a wedding-day. Don’t you believe it! Boy who gets Bobbie Sands has got luck to burn. — Old Bob Sands’s daughter, eh? Know what that girl is worth?”

Bobbie Sands was thinking pretty hard about her own luck these days. The servants’ table heard it from the butler, who had it straight from talk in the dining-room, that the wedding was all off again, Mr. Dalby Morton having been in an auto accident, and to be operated on soon and coming down there to get strong for it. — “So all your fine fixin’s go for nothin’” — to Katy the cook. “You’d better be getting married yourself, the way the whole of it would n’t be goin’ back on you.”

Maggie Wittle, of the still tongue, preserved her character before “all that crowd,” but she went to the housekeeper, who had been nursemaid to the little Roberta and had seen her young lady grow up — far from handsome, but so kind and comical-like, — and to her Maggie told her tale, having some ideas of her own as to personal accountability. Mrs. Duffy praised both her discretion and her frankness and asked to keep for a few days the two letters from Roadside which Maggie had brought in evidence. Next morn-



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ing she stayed unusually long upstairs consulting her mistress, who looked slightly heated when her maid came in to do her hair. But she sat as usual with a book before her mirror, taking no interest, as her way was—to be sure, it was nothing very pleasant she would see there, poor thing, and she going to marry such a handsome young gentleman and the greatest flirt in the city.

Dalby, never clever at a pose, had a good excuse now for languor which he did not hide, and for silence amidst devoted attention, with the entire household at his feet. Not Roberta, however,—that had never been her way with him. She had always read him like a book, and the context which her inside knowledge supplied was hardly needed now; only it made her a little more sure. He lay one afternoon stretched on a couch in the sun-striped corridor, and saw her coming glowering at him kindly from under her big white hat. She was all in white of delicate fabrics and costly needlework, and her sea-browened face looked dark and harsh by contrast. There was another contrast in the sick and faithless mind of her listener. She had brought a new magazine and sat down to share it—reading aloud often took the place of words between them. Presently she put it down.

“Do I tease you, Dalby? Your mind seems to wander. Feeling pretty rotten most of the time?”

“Rather,” said Dalby.

“Any special spot the doctors haven’t reached yet?”

“I fancy they will have some trouble to reach it.”

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"Well, don't despond: we are n't going to be in a hurry.—You could n't trust your old Bobbie? I know you don't fuss about your health much; your father has n't lost his all in the fire—it would n't hurt you if he had. Is it putting off the wedding that plunges you in gloom?"

Dalby racked around on his couch in silence, while she studied him. "There was no rush order on that contract," he began huskily; "you took it coolly—I shall try to do the same. You know, Bobbie, I'm not going to be up to much for a good while, after the doctors are done with me this time: you don't want a sick bridegroom on your hands, unless he's bright enough to make up—"

"But you used to be bright! We used to have good, straight talks—now no more! Can't you trust me, son?"

Dalby's miserable face grew fiery red under her smile of intelligent sarcasm.

"'Son!'" he repeated. "I know I am not in your class, Bobbie, as to books and all that—and you don't feel that I am: honest to God, are n't you taking me half out of pity?"

"Marrying is a desperate business, any way you look at it," said Bobbie. "Might do worse than marry out of pity—only, it's just as well to know what we pity each other for. Blundering pity might be as obnoxious as blundering—friendship trying to pose as love. How is that?"

Here was his opening if he would but take it. Her last wish for Dalby in this fading proposition centered

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solely on the manhood she hoped to see in him before they said good-bye. She had kept back her own knowledge of what those Roadside letters told, that he might have every chance to tell her himself, as she fully believed he would when the strength for it came to him. Was it coming now?

"Bobbie," he sighed hoarsely; "we've known each other ever since we both of us were knee-high, and I never saw a streak of yellow in you.— You would n't fool me now— fool me for life? If you really want me—say so, so a man can believe it. The pride has gone out of me: God knows why any woman should want me!"

Roberta's face became crimson (it was not becoming; alas! that Dalby should see even that, at such a cruel moment). "We have never talked about love, if you remember; but—is there any reason other than your health why I should not want you—on our first understanding? You know what it was?"

Dalby fingered the rope of the awning. — No; it was n't coming, after all: the truth had crept out only to slink back again. He was playing the old trick—making her break her word to him to save confessing that his had already been broken. "It's up to you, Bobbie: take me or leave me. You know I'd shoot myself sooner than smear your pride."

"Is *that* how you look at it?" said Roberta sitting up and speaking in a hard voice. "I had no idea you were taking care of my pride. Just how would you go to work now, to 'smear' it, as you say?"

Dalby looked at her, flushed, harassed—longing

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to appeal to that mother-strength in her nature, which at times he had found almost enough for peace of mind, if not happiness. But wild excesses of fancy had of late shaken his hold on even that slight root of self-respect.

"You might, just as a case in point," Roberta went on coolly, "hypothecate your vows to me and run off with a handsomer girl: that is supposed to 'smear' a woman's pride till people are good enough to forget it. But, you see, I look at it differently. As a brutal fact, a wretch with my alleged millions seldom gets told the truth, which she might possibly be trusted to know. I'm a bitter person and you've nothing to do with that side of me. Only, look out when you try to save my pride: I've a notion I can take care of that myself. There is no occasion, you see, for sacrifices between us — never was, you know."

"You are a wonderful brick, Bobbie: I should rather enjoy being miserable in your company."

"Oh, you are all right, when you don't try to pay compliments. But why *be* miserable — why even stick to each other's company? Don't you begin to catch the drift of my remarks? It was understood at the start that you could n't marry the girl you wanted, and I'd never seen the man I wanted, and time was passing for us both. We thought we might make up to each other for some of the things we were likely to miss if we sulked along single — Now, if one of us should find that he, or she, had given up the greater thing too soon, ought n't there to be a fresh report on the project?"

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"Listen, now : Clare Ludwell has come home, after all her triumphs, not even engaged. Is there nothing in that to your advantage? Why don't you take heart and try again? Clare gave you a lesson, and I can vouch it did you good ; but the treatment can be carried too far. And personally I object to being taken as medicine — beyond a certain point. I think we've reached that point." Roberta rose and extracted her fingers from Dalby's rather hysterical clasp. "Now, lie still and think about it! As to that Red Wine — I'm not metaphorical ; you can't fight that nonsense with Clare ; so don't you fall back ! She would never stand your nerve-racking failures."

"How often have I failed, with you?"

"Not often—in that way." She left him—to think about it. He did not spend much thought over her last words for he seldom expected to read all her odd quirks and meanings. She straightened her big hat over her eyes and went away smiling.

Mary did not prove as obdurate as she had fully intended to be. Her happiness, though sudden, could only mean happiness to her mother, who, like most mothers, strange to say, believed in marriage, and who had always believed in Mr. T. L. Scarth. And so there was a brief but weighty exchange of cablegrams, followed by a quiet wedding at Roadside, and Tom and Mary pass out of this tale down the Marysville road in Tom's little car, not even repainted for the occasion. Tom left it at Sacramento to be sent back for his successor, Cousin Tom's next nominee ; and



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Cousin Tom did ride in it, probably, all over the Tract, when he came up there to lay out his future plans.

For the sake of local color, I wish it could be said that Mary went away in a "refugee suit" from Raphael Weill's (whose generosity at this time the city will never forget), but it was not so, for Dalby did not leave his pecuniary obligations to his father to settle.

What poor Mr. Morton would or would not do in business now it was increasingly difficult to count on—except that it was sure to be wrong. Friends of the family warned Dalby that the sharpers were getting hold of the old man. With a very little trouble, he was told, the necessary steps could be taken to prove his father's "mental incompetence." Dalby took no steps. He said, as long as he was the only one to be considered, his father should do as he pleased with the fortune he had made. Every one called this quixotic; but Dalby seemed indifferent to the sympathy bestowed on his fading patrimony. He declined to remind his father that he was dead while he was still alive to hear news of it. The old man had become very gentle and wistful, and enjoyed his son's visits to the rooms where he lived chiefly in the company of nurses—though he did not always know who the nice young fellow was who paid him so much attention. He had a great many brave stories to tell Dalby of himself, the son who was always present in some dream of that vague twilight in which he was passing away;—as we may pass ourselves, leaving time to restore the best of us in the memories of those we leave behind.



## PART V



## CHAPTER XXXVII

TOM'S successor was on the ground to close up the "romantic" and open the "commercial" period, in the affairs of the Torres Tract. The women saw him plying up and down in Tom's little car and wondered why they had no pangs. It is to be feared their hearts were in the fate of the Tract chiefly through the men of their hearts. Personally, their interest in the new manager centered in the question, Would he be a good master to Bran? The two were introduced at a dinner largely planned for the purpose. Bran had been washed and brushed for the occasion until he looked and felt like white silk plush, but his conduct left much to be desired. He was far too restless and suspicious of a change, which his dumb intuition warned him of, to make the best impression on a stranger. The new master of Roadside, however, was a dog-man: none of Bran's points, not even his fore-knowledge, were wasted. So the last pang, a very keen one, was at least assuaged.

Their guest showed himself a genial person; he took all things into consideration in the self-satisfied, moderate fashion of a successful business man. He took them into consideration, too, — by special orders from Mr. Ludwell, but it came more gracefully as if at first-hand. Torresville would be his headquarters for the present, he said; — very little doing just now, they understood. He begged them to remain in resi-

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dence at the company house for as long as it suited their convenience.

So the packing went forward without haste, yet not without exhaustion, spiritual as well as physical. They were two worn and weary women — though one was very happy — when they turned their faces eastward near the close of September.

Olivia, sensitive and worn herself, trembled like a leaf when she saw Caroline (who she had thought was young!) come up the front steps. She arrived without husband or son — the men for whose sake women go West and stay for years and return with signs of wear and tear upon them, or fine and flourishing, to be comforted by their relatives or silently measured by them; — and the slender girl at her side, a little taller and straighter than her mother, would be leaving her very soon. The older women embraced with that understanding which passeth words. Olivia had lost her young lover in 1864. He had left Harvard to volunteer and had been in fifty battles before he gave his life to his country in the last battle of the war. She was scarcely nineteen, but she accepted no substitute for what counted with her for the summit of experience — though many were offered her before youth and beauty waned. Therefore she was entitled to be keen-sighted and critical of all makeshifts and travesties which passed for happiness in the lives of her young kinsfolk growing up around her, especially the girls.

In their first free talk about the engagement, Caroline mentioned the age of Engracia's lover. Cousin

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Olivia (who was past sixty) gasped in dismay. "A man of forty!—and Engracia—twenty-one. My dear Caroline!"

Caroline said little in defense of her daughter's choice: they would all "see" at the wedding. She had a subtle confidence that Cornish on that occasion would bear himself in a manner to satisfy the most hypercritical; even Olivia who was so exacting about the family bridegrooms.

Olivia was more exacting in the case of Engracia than any of the daughters the new generation had reared. It is difficult to say why, unless in this girl, so hard to describe, with her sub-beauty, sub-genius, half-definitions in every way, she perceived the germ of that capacity for the greater love (which means the greater power to suffer) which was Olivia's own gift of God that had left her life so poor outwardly and kept it so rich within. She studied the girl's face with increasing fear and tenderness.—Thin, thin, and oh, so sweet! But why so thin?—Fatherless, sensitive, high-minded, unpractical, and poor—dependent on a young brother just married. To what fatal compromise might she have lent herself, in this long, drifting summer of suspense? Caroline had said there had been trouble—the child had been unable to make up her mind; she herself had wished it very much and almost given up hoping it could ever be. Olivia knew these mothers. They were practical enough! She was scarcely able to bear her thoughts without speaking; but in that house they did not speak, unless invited, on subjects as delicate as this.

## THE VALLEY ROAD

Cornish had met his travelers at Albany for a few moments as they changed to the Boston and Albany ; that was all the time he could spare just then to his private affairs. He was expected at Chelmsford on the following Saturday.

The Baxter house had once stood half a mile from the edge of the village, with large grounds around it and a high brick wall sheltering its garden and hiding from passers the beauty within, in the old, exclusive English manner. The grounds were less by many acres, though still large for a house that was now within the city limits. There was a new boulevard in front, car-lines east, west, and south, and a German grocery on a neighboring corner. Corner groceries are convenient, but Olivia held to the practice of sticking by her old tradespeople, however far downtown they kept themselves. Other habits she stuck by, too, including six o'clock dinner on Saturday nights ;— old servants were considered as well as old tradesfolk. But a guest arriving by the new dinner-train would be late.

Engracia herself was a trifle late. She had yielded to the desire to be pretty, and repented — of being too pretty — after a glance in her mirror. Mamma and Cousin Olivia would be in high dresses. She feebly compromised, and came down, appealing with downcast eyes from her mother's look of disappointment. Who loves to see her child pretty — even too pretty — as well as one of these human mothers ! But so far as Cornish was concerned, Engracia, no doubt, had the nicer instinct.



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Uncle Benjamin, at whose left she sat, saw and approved of all. He placed his dry, thin hand upon hers, giving her an old man's smile full of memories. There came a sound of rapid wheels outside — the hall door shut upon the quiet entrance of the guest. A soft color flooded her cheek, then died out, leaving her snow-pale.

"Go out, dear," said Uncle Benjamin. "We will excuse you."

As the door closed upon her, he turned to Caroline ; he very seldom made personal remarks.

"Can that child be as lovely as she looks?"

Caroline was speechless ; her breast swelled, her throat strained with emotion. Olivia had seen the little desperate smile, the sudden blanching of that young, startled face : she misunderstood both the daughter's and the mother's agitation. . . . "What a moment, if she does not love him !"

Brief, low tones were heard at intervals in the hall, then silence. The maid had gone up with his bags to light lamps in the guest-chamber.

"A nice voice," sighed Olivia ; "a nice step." He mounted the stairs — not doubtfully, not too free ; — just as a man ought to go, a new guest in the house from which he is soon to take his bride.

Waves of memories crushed through her heart. She heard the footsteps of all the feet on those stairs of welcome and farewell, and along that gallery where the strange step went — past the chambers, hushed, immaculate, of her own long lifetime of guests : — the girls of her own youth, deep dreamers after

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nights of dancing ; the children who slept so sound on snowy Christmas-eves ; watchers with the sick — silence of the chambers where they do not waken ; pale brides, and young mothers, and new babies — carried up the attic stairs a few steps before they were carried down to insure that they would rise in life ; and here, bringing a lover, was the last of those babies now !

Engracia entered, and no one looked at her for a moment ; then all looked at once, and there could be no more doubt. The light of joy seemed to play about her loveliness and fan her like invisible Psyche wings and hedge her in like the spirit-flames that guarded the sleeping Brunnhilda.

In the guest-room lamps were shaded and one of autumn's low fires cast a mild gleam on the hearth. Cornish stood before it with head bent, motionless, his hands behind his back. It was hardly the attitude of prayer, nor was he a believer in many of the mysteries we pray to, but to whatever he did believe in, he prayed then in silence, till calmness came to him and self-command to go down and see her face again before them all ; — he was as shy of his own emotion as any man is who has conquered that side of himself with iron mastery for years.

He knew there is nothing in life but the meanings we put into it, and he prayed for a long life of blessed meanings with this exquisite woman he had won ; — so fearful in her innocence, so keen as death in her discernment. It would be the death of love — such love as he desired of her — that moment she

## THE VALLEY ROAD

recognized the first spot on his soul. He prayed they might keep holy all their days that gift of God, — the love born of her soul in its short knowledge of his. Two years and a little over — it had seemed another life; but now comes life itself. Heaven, if it could but last!

The wedding took place in October, and none of the solemn fuss of the beautiful old ceremony was lacking in honor of the new pair. Who should know about home-weddings if not the Baxters? They were a family of feast-givers: their annals were thick-starred with memorial days — birthdays of young and old, wedding-days and christenings flower-crowned; and other days when the flowers were white and pale faces assembled in farewell to the dead; others again when flags were mingled with the flowers and they dressed the graves of the sons they had given to the nation. They were so numerous still that such gatherings as the present seldom included more than the family and intimate friends, and they were so generally blest as to means that they made a goodly appearance in their gala-gowns and frock-coats. The smart young cousins were particularly smart in the new fall styles, which were very charming that year; the elders were fewer and older, but the old lace and best satins came forth as fresh and symbolic as ever. No curious, only loving, eyes watched the bride as she "paced into the hall," and if there were tears they were tears of happiness too keen for hearts to bear that had their own old store of griefs and memories.

## THE VALLEY ROAD

Uncle Benjamin had just passed his eighty-ninth birthday, a perilous age, and a dangerous season of the year for old gentlemen who think of no one so little as themselves. Doors were open, the house was full of drafts. His silver head shone tall on the front steps at the going away of the bridal pair — uncovered, alas! in the strong west wind, that “drove the dead leaves slanting from the tree”; — swept them across the bride’s pathway as she came down the walk on her husband’s arm, between the ranks of relatives. She turned for one more look at them all, and something told her that one dear and honored head would be missing when that group assembled again — she ran back and kissed him, last of all.

In a little more than a week, she was reading with tears on her cheeks that he had gone to join that other so numerous group in the family plot. The leaves were off the trees that stood bare in a still, soft rain above the group of mourners at his grave.

“Ah, I’m so glad you saw him!” she sighed, lifting her face to be kissed, “and so glad he saw you. He knew why we were happy. He was happy — always, I think. Oh, the beautiful old home it was! Could we ever, if we lived long enough, make a home like that?”

“Different, but just as good, I hope.”

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

THERE had been much brave talk about homes, when Tom and Mary were to be married, and before they went away : how, soon, very soon, when the new house was built, — up that little Korean valley that Tom remembered with a keen, delicious pang, place of the house of his dream, — mother would come then and make her home with them. She would be fascinated with the strangeness of the country, she would adopt all Mary's native mothers and their little brown babies with fat tummies and no clothes to speak of ; she would ride in sedan-chairs and learn not to think of the bearers. There would be visits to Seoul to know the dear Bruces, winters in Japan where it is cold but not *so* cold ; or, when Wiju was flourishing, they might take the grand tour all together, — the journey Tom had waited for, and mother might see something of the big world at last. Mother heard and smiled as a mother should, but that this plan of true young hearts, unforgetful of the ties that bind, would ever bind her, as inmate of a home complete without her, she wisely doubted.

On the train again, going East, it was Engracia who took up the tale and developed her dream, showing how beautifully it would work out for mother to live with “ them ” ; she read sentences from Cornish's letters, perfectly worded to say all a man says for the



## THE VALLEY ROAD

sake of the girl he loves, as to her mother making one of his household permanently. Engracia sat up close and enlarged in flowing fashion, and the child meant all she said. Mamma would renew her youth amidst music and art and talk of new books with old friends: — had n't she always said no one was clever any more as "they" were — the friends of her young days? Now, as many as were left, she would see them all; and wear her best gowns every day and have new ones, "bester still": — "You know, mamma, you always did love clothes. Now you'll be where they grow, and instead of thinking about my clothes you can think about your own." And Engracia would sit up closer and call her mother little names — for she knew, as a daughter knows, that these things would never be. The shadow of a long parting was over them.

To Caroline it sounded very sweet, and to half of her, perhaps, it may have sounded true, but with much the wiser half she put this dream also from her. Who gives a daughter in marriage cannot afford to keep back anything for herself, or she may lose all — even that which she had.

And it cost her no great pang in one way, for she wanted silence and peace; and if there should be problems in these young lives they were not her problems; — and she could not at her time of life bring to a new set of problems the courage she had brought to her own. Nor does the understanding of one generation fit the needs of the next. No; she wanted to lie at anchor in some quiet haven and



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dream her own dreams and think over her life — with him. And more than art or clothes or clever talk, though she had loved these things in her youth, did she love her personal life apart, the solitude she had grown used to and learned to need; — room for the lonely soul which each of us must bring to our last account with life, in preparation for what we trust will come after.

It was to the home she knew first, the shelter of her orphaned youth, that she owed at last this final gift — with a beloved soul beside her that needed nothing for *her* last change to God.

On the evening of the day after the wedding, she went up to say good-night to Uncle Benjamin. He had been a little ailing — there was as yet no alarm. After his tray-supper, he sat reading by his fire. His bedroom was the large corner room with the state-liest mahogany furniture and a four-poster in full panoply in its shadowy alcove.

“Caroline,” he said, keeping her hand, “sit down a moment more. . . . When the time comes for me to leave Olivia here alone, would you be willing to make your home with her?” Uncle Benjamin said things simply and plainly.

“Uncle, I think Olivia must choose her own house-mates, but if she should wish it, nothing could be sweeter or more restful to me.”

“That is all I wanted. I have never spoken to Olivia; but if she should wish it, will you remember, dear, I wished it too?”

“Ah, don’t say ‘wished.’”

## THE VALLEY ROAD

"It is immaterial," he answered gently. "The tenses draw close together."

It took but a few words, — on the evening after the funeral, hardly a week later, — to settle what Caroline should do with the remnant of her life. Friendship is the last of our passions on earth, or should be : unhappy are those who maintain the high emotional temperatures to the end.

"You will not leave me now, Caroline? I see no reason why we should ever part again — if you are content to stay here and fold your wings. You must be very tired."

"My wings are broken, if I ever had any," said Caroline, speaking with difficulty. "I shall be content as long as you are satisfied to have me. But I am not very good company."

"Nor I," Olivia answered. "We are both used to our own poor company — that is something."

Four days later, Caroline said : "It is very soon for me to bring my friends in upon you, but I have had a telegram from a very dear friend who passes us on Thursday : she asks if she may call? It is Anna Ludwell ; — you know who she is? She understands how it is with us — you would not have to see her."

"I should love to see her! I know, of course, who she is. We have a number of mutual friends, though I never happen to have met her."

"She is a very charming woman."

"I know that, too : ask her to dinner and for over-night."

"That would hardly be possible for her, I think.

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She only stops over one train. I wish she had her daughter with her. Clare is one of the prettiest girls you have ever seen, — a perfect flower of the West Coast : they have them there as sumptuous and delicate as hothouse roses, but they grow them in the open."

On Thursday afternoon, Olivia said, while they were waiting for their guest, "You two Californians will have a great deal to talk over : you must let me slip out after a while and leave you to yourselves."

Caroline laughed a little : "Well, I don't know that Anna Ludwell is a Californian any more than she is some other things. She is remarkably like you, in one thing: she is one type of the 'vanishing lady.' "

Anna arrived, as usual very perfect in dress and very sweet and simple in manner — with her light, cool kiss on Caroline's cheek, her sensitive meeting of the eyes. Nothing in the least was lost upon her as to the beautiful old room they sat in, or that other type of the vanishing lady pouring tea at her great-grandmother's tea-table out of the Georgian silver into white-and-gold cups of the Empire. It was not the table or the silver or the room ; — it was the soul of the house that she felt, born of four generations of gentle memories — hearts that asked but a few things, not for themselves alone, and were faithful to those few.

Olivia went away and the two sat closer and looked deeper and less shyly into each other's eyes. It seemed to Caroline as if some slight, intangible veil or barrier were gone. They met more nearly on a common and

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personal plane. This need not be explained, although it affected Caroline with a mild spiritual amazement to realize that at last, now that all she had lived for was ended, and she was no more than an empty seed-pod sunning itself in a withered garden in the latter days of November—because it was a beautiful, stately, sheltered garden and not the open, sun-dried plain—Anna no longer pitied her—did not shrink from contemplating her circumstances. No, it was not worldliness; it was a feeling for backgrounds. Our backgrounds that we are so unconscious of—how they matter to our friends, especially those who have had a free choice of backgrounds for themselves! But the slight pause of wonder passed quickly in mutual questions about the children.

“Tell me about Clare!—if there is anything to tell, except that she is prettier than ever and just as joyous and natural.”

“Clare is not joyous,” Anna said, musing, with averted eyes; “and she is not as natural as she used to be. We cannot always fathom our child in these days: I think she has suffered.”

“I have seen her suffer,” said Caroline. “And there was one other who suffered. I shall never forget his face as he lay there in that chance bedroom—beaten, ashamed, his happiness gone; but no excuses, no levity, no sullenness, no defiance, no complaints. All that was literally true of him, though I did not think of it at the time.”

“Oh, Dalby was always a ‘good losing sport,’” said Anna impatiently.

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"Ah, no; it was more than that — or why should that impression of him haunt me? I cannot stop thinking of him, though he has gone so completely out of my life."

"He haunts us," said Anna. "Unfortunately he has not gone out of our lives — we cannot get him out."

"That means, I suppose, that Clare has not forgotten?"

"She is silent, but she has not forgotten; at least, she refuses to think of any one else. Tom has given them two years, to test their attachment to each other."

"Do you think, at their age, young love requires that sort of handling? There might not be much left to test after two years, and yet a beautiful thing have perished."

"It was not beautiful at first — you know that. If it is real, it can bear chastening, even chastising."

"But not long, slow crushing! . . . Have you anything against him now, or is it the past that cannot be forgiven?"

"Oh, we forgive, but what *is* he? Clare is all we have in the world: she is a representative child."

"But she is herself, too, and a very real self. Is it that you compare him with others?"

"Certainly we do. Clare might be the wife, tomorrow, of a man whose life would be well worth living — mistress of large opportunities, and incidentally of one or two of the old, great mansions of England."

("Backgrounds again," thought Caroline.)



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"But if she does n't love this personage and does love the poor boy she humbled so?"

"If it's *that*, of course there is nothing to be done; but we must find if it *is* that."

"You speak like a good American mother. So, if at the end of two years, we hear that they are engaged?"

"You may assume it is that, and we have stepped aside."

"I think you are so wise."

"To wait, you mean?"

"— To step aside."

"That is very well for you to say: both your children married to suit your wishes."

Caroline smiled: "Not entirely. Don't you suppose I had my dreams for my 'representative' boy? But I can say already, it is better as it is. I think, before those two years are up, you will be saying the same yourself."

Whereupon the hostess entered, and soon after Anna rose to take leave.

"May I always come when we are going back and forth?"

"They take us on the way to something better," Caroline explained, smiling.

"Not better," her friend corrected, "only bigger and more various."

"Well, the love of variousness passes — and the East is big enough for remnants of families. It is very comfortable for old ladies."

"It's quite the right place for her—" Anna ad-



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dressed her hostess, holding Caroline's hand : " she never was at heart a pioneer. Adventures were thrust upon her — the most conservative woman that ever lived."

" I don't know what adventures you mean ! Do you call it adventurous, living fifteen years at Road-side ? "

" A desperate adventure ! " Anna confessed her true sentiments at last.

The two women laughed like girls — they hardly knew why — and embraced till next time. Naturally they were more at ease together, for pride on one side was gone, the vigilant pride of a wife in defense of the life her husband is able to give her ; and on the other, careful hesitations of all kinds not to wound that pride or suggest comparisons.

Olivia and Caroline lived on in the peace of an unexacting companionship, which at times held no more speech than if they had been two men ; again they had long, satisfying orgies of talk ; they never knew when to go to bed, and each felt a guilty relief if the other went first and left her alone with a book for a last luxurious hour before locking up and putting out the lights.

Caroline had found a quite unlooked-for pleasure in Mrs. Gladwyn's letters, supplementing Mary's cheerful, safe, matter-of-fact reports on domestic affairs — Tom, of course, never wrote. Mrs. Gladwyn, under Providence, was tenderly grateful to Tom who had brought her child back to her and lodged her safe under a good man's roof ; correspondingly she

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was grieved to think of Mrs. Scarth who had lost her son. Her letters told exactly the little things Mary was still too self-conscious with Tom's mother to write. Mrs. Gladwyn had the courage of middle-age and of her own period of expansive letter-writers; she had no shyness about singing Tom's praises to his mother across the seas. The correspondence became a great bond between two women who might never see each other, but whose lives were interlocked forever through their children. Incidentally, it gave Caroline a truer knowledge of the woman her son had chosen.

THE END



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